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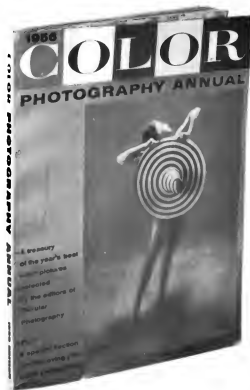
AMAZING STORIES

SEPTEMBER 1956 VOL. 30 NO. 9



A WORLD CALLED CRIMSON By Darius John Granger
Where Vicious Treachery Was the Law of the Land!

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172
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BY THE EDITOR

• There is a question we would like to ask: *What's with atomic waste?* We ask this question strictly as a layman and from a seat far out in the bleachers. The deal, as we see it, is this: Tons and tons of ore is processed in order to render a very small amount of the genuine atomic article. This leaves tons of radio-active residue, deadly to all life forms, that can hardly be tossed into the backyard. The danger of course is recognized by scientists and more power to them.

But we bleacherites, contrary to general opinion, have a crude kind of common sense and there's an angle to the problem that scares us almost as much as Yogi Berra coming up with two on and two out.

It's this: The atomic waste problem is a natural for the buck passers in that it isn't going to kill anybody off this week or next or maybe for the next X number of years. So that puts it in the same category with forest conservation, natural resource squandering, soil erosion, and the gradual lowering of fresh water tables; in the same category because the people in responsible positions—the ones who should be doing something about it—can say to themselves: *There's no immediate crisis involved here—nothing upon which I or my party must stand or fall at the next election. So let's leave it for some coming generation. I'll be long gone then.*

So the problem is shunted off with airy assurances such as: *We'll ship the stuff to the moon. Just like saying: Put that man on third. That'll win the game.*

But we bleacherites are not so easily reassured. This is a deadly serious game with human survival at stake. Besides, we know who's on third. But we're not so sure about the moon.

Nobody's hit one that far yet.

PWF.

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CONTENTS

A WORLD CALLED CRIMSON	
By Darius John Granger.....	6
BUT WHO WILTS THE LETTUCE?	
By Ellis Hart.....	22
THE MAN WHO HATED MARS	
By Randall Garrett.....	38
VITAL INGREDIENT	
By Gerald Vance.....	54
THE HUNTED HEROES	
By Robert Silverberg.....	64
LEASE TO DOOMSDAY	
By Lee Archer.....	78

DEPARTMENTS

THE OBSERVATORY	
By The Editor.....	3
SPECTROSCOPE	
By Villiers Gerson.....	94
... OR SO YOU SAY	
By The Readers.....	97



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*There was a boy and a girl
and a strange new planet;
the planet was alive with
hideous dangers. But the boy
and girl were very young and
all Robin wanted to know
was: "Who stole my doll?"*

A WORLD CALLED CRIMSON

By
DARIUS JOHN GRANGER

When the starship Star of Fire collided with a meteor swarm six parsecs stellar north of the galactic hub in the year A.D. 2278, it lost its atmosphere within forty-five minutes. At first it was thought that every man, woman and child of the four thousand, one hundred and sixty-six aboard were lost, in this the greatest of all interstellar disasters. But as was discovered twenty years later in the Purcell exploration, this was not quite the case. (See PURCELL)

—from *The ANNALS
OF SPACE*, Vol. 12





The Cyclops—not hungry at the moment—regarded Robin as a new toy.

IT WAS the nasty little boy from B Deck who had stolen her doll. She hated him. He was horrid. She slipped out of their stateroom while her Mom and Dad were dressing for dinner. She'd find that horrid little boy on B Deck. She'd scratch his eyes out.

Her name was Robin Sinclair and she was five years old and mad enough to throw the boy from B Deck out into space, only she didn't know how to go about that.

She went down the companionway to B Deck, where the people dressed differently. The colors weren't as bright, somehow, the cloth not so fine. It was a major distinction in the eyes of a five-year-old girl, especially one who loved to run her fingers over fine synthetics and who even had a favorite color. Her favorite color was crimson.

"'Scuse me, mister. Didja see a little boy with a doll with a crimson dress on?"

A smile. But she was deadly serious. "Not me, young lady."

She walked for a while aimlessly on B Deck. She saw two little boys, but they weren't the right ones. Pouting now, almost in tears, she was on the verge of giving up. Mom and Dad could buy her

a new doll. Mom and Dad were richer than anybody, weren't they?

Then, all of a sudden, she saw him. He was just ducking out of sight up ahead. Under his arm was tucked the doll with the crimson dress, her favorite doll.

"Hey!" she cried. "Hey, wait for me!"

Her little feet pounding, she raced down the companionway. As she reached the iris door in the bulkhead, an electric eye opened it for her. She had never come this way before. It was not as bright and clean as the rest of the ship. She had not even seen the sign which said **PASSENGERS NOT PERMITTED BEYOND THIS POINT**. But then, she could barely read, anyway.

She caught a quick second glimpse of the boy, and started running as he rounded a turn in the corridor. Shouting for him to stop, she reached the turn and saw him up ahead. He looked back at her and stuck out his tongue and kept running.

It was then that the whole world shuddered, like it was trying to shake itself to pieces.

Alarm bells clanged everywhere. Whistles shrilled.

Pretty soon uniformed men were running in all directions. Robin Sinclair was suddenly very frightened. She wanted to go back to A Deck, to her Mom and Dad, but she had followed the boy through so many twisting, turning corridors that she knew she would be lost if she tried. She looked ahead. The boy seemed confident as he made his way. She followed him. But she was really mad at him now. It was his fault she was so far from Mom and Dad when a thing like this happened.

Uniformed members of the crew continued rushing by. She heard snatches of conversation she didn't understand.

"Trying to patch it . . ."

"The whole stern section of the ship. Losing air fast . . ."

"The lifeboats. I was just down there. Every last one of 'em. Gone. The meteor took 'em right off into space."

"If the damage can't be repaired . . ."

And one man, finally, with a face awful to behold: "Patches won't hold. We're losing air faster'n it can be replaced. Better tell the Captain."

A man in a lot of gold braid rushed into view. He was distinguished looking,

but old. Boy, he was old, Robin thought. He looked as old as her grandfather.

"Captain! We're losing too much air. It can't be replaced."

"Then prepare to abandon ship."

"But, sir, every lifeboat is gone!"

"No lifeboats? No lifeboats!"

The boy stuck his tongue out again. She ran after him, shaking her little fist. They were completely absorbed in their private enmity while the word went out that the situation was hopeless and almost five thousand people prepared to die.

"I've got you now!"

He had run up against a blank wall. She came toward him, holding her hands out for the doll with the crimson dress. He held it behind his back. She reached around to get it but he pushed her and she fell down.

"I'll fix you!" she threatened, getting up and rushing toward him again. Big arms came down, and big hands grabbed her.

"There now, little miss," a voice said. "Why aren't you with your folks? Time like this, you ought to be with your folks. What is it, B Deck?"

"A Deck," Robin said haughtily. "He's from B. Why is everybody running around so?"

He was a tall, slat-thin man with a kind-looking face. "Say, wait a minute!" he suddenly said, looking perplexed. "They all the time said I was nuts, building that damn thing. Well, I can't fit into it, but maybe these here kids can."

He scooped Robin up with one hand, got the boy with the other. "I want my doll!" Robin cried, but the boy held it away from her.

"Take it easy now," the man said. "Take it easy. We'll take care of you."

He ran with them to one of the repair bays of the great, doom-bound starship. In one corner, beyond the now useless patching equipment, was a table. On the table stood a model of the *Star of Fire*. It was six feet long and perfect in every external detail. He hadn't got around to the inside yet. The inside was completely empty. It had rockets and everything. There was no reason why it wouldn't be perfectly space-worthy. Why, it would even hold an atmosphere . . .

"In you go!" he said.

The little boy was suddenly

scared. "I want my Mother," he said. "I want my Dad."

"In you go."

Robin felt herself lifted, and thrust inside something. It was dark in there. She moved around and bumped into something. She moved around some more and bumped against the little boy from B Deck.

"How do you get out of here?" she asked.

"I don't know," he said.

"I want my doll back," she said.

"Oh yeah?"

"You better give it to me."

He said nothing. There was a hissing sound, and a faint roar. Far away, something slid ponderously.

"Pleasant voyage, little ones!" a voice boomed.

Something sat on her chest all at once, squeezing all the air from her. It was a great weight holding her motionless, squeezing. She wanted to cry, but couldn't get the sound out. She wanted her Mom. Mom would know what to do.

She was crushed and flattened into a tunnel of blackness.

Thirty minutes later, the starship *Star of Fire*, out-world bound from Sol to the starswarms beyond Ophiuchus, lost all its remaining

air. It became an enormous coffin spinning end over end in space amid the blaze of starlight near the center of the galaxy.

One tiny spaceship, a small model of the huge liner, sped away. If it went two days finding no planet, its two occupants would perish when the small oxygen supply gave out. If it found a planet it would circle and land automatically. The possibility of this was small, but not remote. For here at the center of the galaxy, stellar distances are more nearly planetary and most of the stars have attendant planets. But even then, it would have to be a world capable of supporting their lives . . .

They sped on, in all innocence. She was five. He was six. His name was Charlie Fullerton. He had her doll. She hated him.

Two hours after the tiny model spaceship landed on a planet with three suns in the sky, Robin Sinclair awoke. She felt cramped and uncomfortable. It took her a while to orient herself. She had some kind of a dream. A dream was a funny thing. Mom said it wasn't real. But it sure was real to her.

She got up and pushed with

her hands. A section of the tiny spaceship sprang away at her touch, admitting blinding light. She lay there with her eyes tightly shut, but after a while she could see. The boy was sleeping. She still hated him. He was sleeping with her doll in his arms. She took the doll and he moved his arms and woke up. She jumped out of the open spaceship with the doll and started running.

She ran along a beach. But the sand was green. The ocean hissed and roared and there was nobody else. "N'ya! N'ya! Y'can't catch me!" she bawled at the top of her voice. And fell down in the sand.

He caught up with her and fell on top of her and they wrestled for the doll. The surf thundered nearby. The tide, capricious in the grip of the three suns, rose suddenly, flooding them with chill water. Coughing and spluttering and choking, they retreated further up the beach.

Soon they quieted down.

"I'm soaking wet," she said.

"My name is Charlie," he said sullenly. "Let's go back now."

"How do we go back?" she wanted to know.

"That's a nice doll," Charlie said.

"You took it from me!" Accusingly.

"Aw, I only wanted to look at it."

"She has a crimson dress and everything."

"This is some world," Charlie said after a while.

"What's a world?"

"Oh, a world is—you know—everything."

"Oh."

"You think it has Indians?"

She said, "It ought to have Indians, anyhow."

"And pirates too?" he asked in a voice full of awe.

She nodded her head very seriously. "I like pirates," she said. "They're so scarey."

Just then a ship came into view far away across the water. It had enormous sails and a black hull. On the fore-sail was painted a huge black skull.

"Let's get out of here!" Charlie cried in alarm. But beetling cliffs reared behind the beach and although they ran frantically along at the edge of the green sand, they could find no way to scale the cliffs. The pirate ship came closer and closer.

They got down whimpering at the base of the cliffs and remained very still. After a long time the pirate ship came close to shore. A longboat was dispatched and its

oars flashed in the triple sunlight like giant legs on which the longboat walked across the waves toward the beach.

Then the pirates were ashore. The man who led them had only one leg, and a peg. He looked very mean.

"It's Blackbeard the Pirate!" said Charlie in a frightened whisper. His Dad had once read him a story about Blackbeard.

The pirate with the wooden leg suddenly had a black beard.

"The doll!" cried Robin.

"What's the matter?"

"We left her down there. Crimson." She called her doll Crimson because she had a crimson dress.

Now Blackbeard approached the model spaceship with his crew. They gathered around it, frowning. Robin watched, her face pale, her eyes wide. Crimson was there on the sand. They were going to see Crimson. Even as she was thinking these horrible thoughts, one of the pirates saw Crimson and picked her up. Blackbeard came over and took the doll and looked at her. At that moment there was a shout from above the cliffs and an arrow suddenly transfixed one of the pirates. He fell down writhing and

Blackbeard and the rest of his men raced back to the longboat.

"Indians," Charlie whispered knowingly.

The Indians shouted and yelled.

"Are there any cowboys here?" Robin asked hopefully.

"No, sir. No cowboys," Charlie said very definitely.

"I'm hungry," Robin said. "I wish we had something."

With a little squeal of delight, she looked down at her feet. Two platters of fried chicken, with all the trimmings. Her favorite. They ate ravenously, not hearing the Indians any more. They watched the longboat return to the pirate ship. All this way, they could see little Crimson's dress as Blackbeard took her aboard. Robin finished her fried chicken and started to cry.

"Girls," said Charlie in disgust.

"I can't help it. Poor Crimson."

"Is she dead?"

"Blackbeard the pirate took her."

"Charles was my grandfather's name. My grandfather died and they named me Charles."

"I want Crimson!"

"Get down! The Indians will see you."

"The Indians went away. I want Crimson!"

"We could name this beach after Crimson."

"Aw, what do you know? It's only a beach."

"We could name the whole wide world." Charlie gestured expansively.

The green sand of the beach became crimson. The sky had a crimson glow.

"It sure is a funny world," Charlie said. Laughter loud as thunder echoed in the sky. "A world called Crimson," he added.

The tide came in. Spray and surf bounded off the rocks, wetting them. "We better go up the hill," Robin said. By hill she meant the perpendicular cliffs behind them.

The tide thundered in. They were sodden. They clung to the rocks.

"We need an elevator or something," Charlie said.

Golden cables flashed in the sunlight. The gilt elevator cage came down. They climbed in as a big wave came and battered the rocks. The elevator went up, up to the top of the cliff. They could see a long way across the water. They could watch the pirate ship sailing away, the skull black as night on its sail.

They got out of the elevator

at the top of the cliff. They didn't see any Indians, but they saw the ashes of a campfire.

"Are there lions and tigers and everything?" Robin asked in wonder, gazing out over the beach and the sea and then turning around to see the green forest which began fifty yards beyond the edge of the cliff.

"Sure there are lions and tigers," Charlie said matter-of-factly.

Off somewhere in the woods, a big cat roared. Robin whimpered.

"I w-was only fooling," Charlie said, vaguely understanding that you could somehow make things happen on this world called Crimson.

But he learned a lesson that night. You could make things happen on Crimson, but you couldn't unmake them.

The tiger roared again. But they were downwind from it and it went elsewhere in search of prey. Huddled together near the embers of the Indian campfire, the two children slept fitfully through the cold night.

Then the three suns finally came up on three different sides of the horizon. Crimson was deadly, but beautiful. . . .

Although credit for the discovery of Aladdin's Planet goes to the explorer Richard Purcell of Earth, two Earth children actually were shipwrecked there twenty years before Purcell's expedition. But instead of paving the way for Purcell, they actually made the exploration more difficult for him. In fact, it was positively fraught with peril. But since Aladdin's Planet had become the galaxy's arsenal of plenty, it was well worth Purcell's effort. As any schoolboy knows in this utopia of 24th century plenty, Aladdin's Planet, almost exactly at the heart of the galaxy, where matter is spontaneously created to sweep out in long cosmic trails across the galaxy, is the home not merely of spontaneous creation of matter, but spontaneous formed creation, with any human psyche capable of doing the handwork of God. A planet of great import. . .

—from The ANNALS OF SPACE, Vol. 2

She stood poised for a glorious moment on the very edge of the rock, the bronze and pink of her glistening in the sun, the spray still clinging to her from her last dive. Then, grace in every line of her lithe body, she sprang

from the rock in a perfectly executed swan dive.

Charlie helped her out, smiling. "That was pretty," he said.

"Well, you taught me how." Her figure was not yet that of a woman, but far more than that of a girl. She was very beautiful and Charlie knew this although he had no standards to judge by, except for the Indian women they occasionally saw or Blackbeard's slave girls when the pirate ship came in to trade.

Unselfconsciously, Robin climbed into her gold-mesh shorts. Charlie helped her fasten the gold-mesh halter. Long, long ago—it seemed an unreal dream, almost—he had been a very small boy and his mother had taken him to a show in which everyone danced and sang and wore gold-mesh clothing. He had never forgotten it, and now all their clothing was gold-mesh.

Robin spun around and looked at him. Her tawny blonde hair fell almost to her waist, and he helped her comb it with a jewel-encrusted comb he had wished into being a few days before.

"I so like Crimson!" she cried impulsively.

Charlie smiled. "Why,

that's a funny thing to say. Is there any other kind of a place?"

"You mean, but Crimson?" "Yes."

"I don't know. It is funny. Sometimes I think—"

Charlie smiled at her, a little condescendingly. "Oh, it's the book again, is it?" he asked.

"All right. It's the book. Stop making fun of me."

Many years ago, when they'd been small children, they had returned to the ruined spaceship which had brought them to Crimson. It had been empty except for the book, as if the book had been placed there for them by whatever power had put them in the spaceship. Naturally, they had not been able to read, but they kept the book anyway. Then one day, years later, Robin had wished to be able to read and the next time she lifted the book and opened it, the magic of the words was miraculously revealed to her. The book was called **A ONE VOLUME ENCYCLOPEDIA HISTORY** and it told about just everything—except Crimson. There was no mention of Crimson at all. Robin read the book over and over again until she almost knew it by heart. Even Charlie had listened to it

twice all the way through when she read it, but he had never wished for the ability to read himself.

Now Charlie asked: "Do you really believe the Book? This is Crimson. This is real."

"I don't know. Sometimes I think this isn't as real as everything in the Book. And sometimes I just don't know."

They walked in silence to their elevator and took it to the top of the highest cliff. They had wished for a house there, like one Robin had seen in the book. They had wished for many things to make their lives interesting, or pleasant. They had peopled Crimson with the fruit of their wishes, using the ONE VOLUME ENCYCLOPEDIA HISTORY as a guide.

They lived a mile from the Indian Camp. They traded with the Indians who, strangely, did not know how to wish for things. Neither did the pirates, or anyone. Just Robin and Charlie. The pirates lived across the sea on an island. To the south along the shore were Phoenicians, Greeks, Mayas, Royal Navy-men, Submariners, mermaids and Cyclopes. To the north along the shore were Polynesians, Maoris, Panamanians

and Dutchmen. Inland were Cannibals, Lotus Eaters, a few settlements of cowboys to make life interesting for the Indians, farmers, Russians, Congressmen and Ministers. All had been created by Robin and Charlie, who visited them sometimes. They never believed for a minute that Robin and Charlie had really created them, although all were amazed by Robin and Charlie's ability to make things appear out of thin air.

Just as they reached their house, an Indian brave came running down the trail toward them.

"Skyship come!" he cried, gesturing wildly and excitedly.

"Skyship?" repeated Charlie, looking at Robin. "Have you created any spaceships?"

"No. You know it's a bargain between us. We don't create anything we don't think we understand."

The Indian was sweating. His name was Tashtu, which meant Wild Eagle, and he was their go-between with the tribe. "Skyship sweep across heavens," he said. "Not land. Go up in Wild Country."

Charlie's interest quickened. Wild Country. They had created it on impulse, about twenty miles from the Indian

Camp, midway between the settlements of Congressmen inland and Cyclopes on the shore. It was a place of tortuous gorges and rocks and mountains, utterly lifeless. No one ever went there. Someday, he had always told Robin, they would explore Wild Country. If there really was a spaceship, and if it had gone there . . .

"No," Robin said. "I know what you're thinking. But I'm perfectly happy here."

"You just now said you sometimes thought Crimson wasn't real and there were other, real worlds which—"

"That's different. I can dream, can't I?"

"But don't you see, if a spaceship's really come, maybe they can tell us."

She gripped his arm. "Charlie. Oh, Charlie, I don't know. I'm afraid. We've been happy here, haven't we? We really wouldn't want it to change . . ."

"I'm going to Wild Country," Charlie said stubbornly. Tashtu nodded his head. "It is good that you do. For the braves—"

"Don't tell me they went after the skyship?" Charlie asked.

"Yes, Lord. Skyship come low, ruin crops mile around.

War dance follow. War party leave last sunrise."

"Six hours ago!" Charlie cried. "Can we overtake them?"

Tashtu shrugged. "Hurry, Lord."

"Don't you see," Charlie told Robin. "They're savages. They wouldn't understand anything like spaceships. They wouldn't want to. If they get the chance, they'll kill first and ask questions afterwards. We've got to go to the Wild Country now."

Big and brawny Tashtu was nodding his head earnestly, but Robin seemed unconvinced. "Why," she said, "there isn't even anything about Wild Country in the Book."

"That's because we made it."

"And besides, the Congressmen are dangerous."

"Congressmen? Don't you mean the Cyclopes?"

"Yes, I'm sorry. The Cyclopes are dangerous."

She couldn't possibly have meant the Congressmen. It was never clear to either of them precisely what a Congressman did. But there were hundreds of them on one side of Wild Country and they were forever making speeches and promises, little round bald men with great, rich

voices and wonderful vocabularies. Charlie loved to hear them speak.

"We go, Lord?" Tashtu asked.

Charlie nodded and went inside swiftly for his rifle. It was modeled after the most powerful rifle in the Encyclopedia and was called a Mannlicher Elephant Gun. Robin came with her own smaller Springfield repeater.

"Ready?" Charlie asked.

"Yes. We can think up food along the trail."

"Hurry, Lord," Tashtu urged.

Charlie could hardly contain his excitement. The Wild Country, at last. And a spaceship.

By the time they were ready to make planetfall on the unexplored world, Purcell knew his dislike of Glaudot bordered on actual hatred. Purcell, who was forty-five years old and a bachelor, liked his spacemen tough, yes: you had to be tough to land on, explore, and subdue a couple of dozen worlds, as Purcell himself had done. But he also liked his spacemen with humility: facing the unknown and sometimes the unknowable at every step of the way, you needed humility.

Glaudot, younger than Pur-

cell by fifteen years, confident, arrogant, a lean hard man and handsome in a gaunt-cheeked, saturnine way, lacked humility. For one thing, he treated the crew like dirt and had treated them that way since blastoff from Earth almost five months before. For another, he seemed impatient with Purcell's orders, although Purcell was not a cautious man, and certainly not a timid one. What had been growing between them flared out into the open moments before planetfall.

"I can't get over it," Purcell said. "I've never seen a world anything like it." They had made telescopic observations from within the atmosphere. "Giants living in caves," Purcell went on. "Sailing ships flying the Jolly Roger. A town consisting of miniature replicas of the White House on Earth. Mermaids."

"Don't tell me you really thought you saw mermaids?" Glaudot asked a little condescendingly.

"All right, I'll admit I only caught a glimpse of them. I thought they were mermaids. But what about the Indians?"

"Yes," Glaudot admitted. "I saw the Indians."

Using their atmospheric rockets, they had flown over

the Indian village at an altitude of only a few hundred feet, to see bronze-skinned men rush out of tents and stare up at them in awe. After that, Purcell had decided to find some desolate spot in which to land, in order not to risk a too-sudden encounter with any of the fantastically diversified natives.

Now Glaudot said: "You're taking what we saw too literally, Captain. Why, I remember on Harfonte we had all sorts of hallucinations until Captain Jamison discovered they were exactly that—we'd been hypnotized into seeing the things we most feared by powerless natives who really feared us."

"This isn't Harfonte," Purcell said, a little irritably.

"Yeah, but you weren't there."

"I know that, Glaudot. I'm only trying to point out that each world must be considered as unique. Each world presents its own problems, which—"

"I say this is like Harfonte all over again. I say if you'd had the guts to land right smack in the middle of that Indian village, you'd have seen for yourself. I say to play it close to the vest is ridiculous," Glaudot said, and

then smiled deprecatingly. "Begging your pardon, of course, Captain. But don't you see, man, you've got to show the extraterrestrials, whatever form they take, that Earthmen aren't afraid of them."

"Caution and fear aren't the same thing," Purcell insisted. He didn't know why he bothered to explain this to Glaudot. Perhaps it was because Ensign Chandler, youngest man in the exploration party, was in the lounge listening to them. Chandler was a nice kid, clean cut and right out of the finest tradition of Earth, but Chandler was, like all boys barely out of their teens, impressionable. He was particularly impressionable in these, his first month in space.

"When you're cautious it's as much to protect the natives as yourself," Purcell went on, and then put into simple words what Glaudot and Chandler should have learned at the Academy for Exploration, anyway.

When he finished, Glaudot shrugged and asked: "What do you think, Ensign Chandler?"

Chandler blushed slowly. "I—I'd rather not say," he told them. "Captain Purcell is—the captain."

Glaudot smiled his triumph at Purcell. It was then, for the first time, that Purcell's dislike for the man became intense. Purcell wondered how long he'd been poisoning the youth's mind against the doctrines of the Academy.

Just then a light glowed in the bulkhead and a metallic voice intoned: "Prepare for landing. Prepare for landing at once."

Purcell, striding to his blast-hammock, told Glaudot, who was the expedition's exec, "I'll want the landing party ready to move half an hour after planetfall."

"Yes, sir," said Glaudot eagerly. At least there was something they agreed on.

"Men," Purcell told the small landing party as they assembled near the main airlock thirty-five minutes later, "we have an obligation to our civilization which I hope all of you understand. While here on this unknown world we must do nothing to bring discredit to the name of Earth and the galactic culture which Earth represents."

They had all seen the bleak moon-like landscape through the viewports. They were eager to get out there and plant the flag of Earth and determine what the new

world was like. There were only eight of them in the first landing party: others would follow once the eight established a preliminary base of operations. The eight were wearing the new-style, lightweight spacesuits which all exploration parties used even though the temperature and atmosphere of the new world seemed close enough to Earth-norm. It had long ago been decided at the Academy that chances couldn't be taken with some unknown factor, possibly toxic, fatal and irreversible, in an unknown atmosphere. After a day or two of thorough laboratory analysis of the air they'd be able to chuck their spacesuits if all went well.

They filed through the airlock silently, Purcell first with the flag of Earth, then Glaudot, then the others. White faces watched from the viewport as they clomped across the convoluted terrain.

"Nobody here but us chickens!" Glaudot said, and he laughed, after they had walked some way across the desolate landscape. "But then, what did you expect? Captain took us clear of all the more promising places."

The man's only motive, Purcell decided, was his colossal ego. He made no reply:

that would be descending to Glaudot's level.

After they walked almost entirely across the low-walled crater in which the exploration ship had come down, and after Purcell had planted the flag on the highest pinnacle within the low crater walls, Glaudot said:

"How's about taking a look-see over the top, Captain? At least that much."

Purcell wasn't in favor of the idea. It would mean leaving sight of the ship too soon. But the radio voices of most of the men indicated that they agreed with Glaudot, so Purcell shrugged and said a pair

of volunteers could go, if they promised to rejoin the main party within two hours.

Glaudot immediately volunteered. That at least made sense. Glaudot had the courage of his convictions. Several others volunteered, but the first hand up had been Ensign Chandler's.

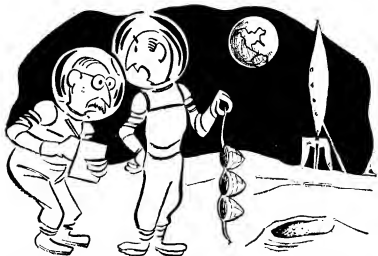
"I don't want to sound like a martinet," Purcell told them. "But you understand that by two hours I mean two hours. Not a minute more."

"Yes, sir," Chandler said.

"Glaudot?"

"Yes, sir," the Executive Officer replied.

(Continued on page 105)



"Maybe they are human, Smithers, but I still say they're different."

But Who Wilts the Lettuce?

By ELLIS HART

There was this odd little invader from outer space named Eggzaborg, and all alone and single-handed, he was going to conquer Earth. How? It wouldn't be difficult, he explained. First, you started out by confusing everybody to death. Then—but let Eggzaborg tell it.

TUESDAY . . .

Henry Leclair's eyes did a double-take. They snapped between the Chinese fortune cookie in his right hand and the Chinese fortune cookie fortune in his left. He read it again: "Tuesday."

Then again, querulously, "Tuesday?"

That was all. Nothing more; no phrase telling anything about Tuesday, no accompanying notation. Nothing. Just the slim, slightly-gray piece of paper with the printed word *Tuesday* and a period immediately after it. This was indeed strange.

Henry muttered to himself. "Why Tuesday?" He absently let the fortune cookie slip from his fingers.

"Damn!" he murmured, watching the cookie sink

quickly to the bottom of his water glass.

He returned his attention to the fortune. *Tuesday*. That was today. Biting his lower lip with ferocity, Harry reached for the second of the three cookies. He pulled at the edge of the fortune paper protruding from the convoluted pastry. Placing the cookie back on its plate carefully, he turned the slip over and read it:

"You're the one."

Henry Leclair had been a premature baby. His mother, Martha Annette Leclair, had not carried him the full nine months. There had been no explanation except the vagaries of the female physiology. However, there *was* another explanation: Henry Leclair—



"Okay," Eggzaborg said. "Now let's get down to business."

even pre-natal—had been curious. He had wanted free from the womb, had wanted to discover what was out there.

When he was two years old, Henry had been discovered in bombay-bottom pajamas, in mid-winter, crouched in the snow outside his home, waiting to see whether the white stuff fell from above or came up through the ground. Curiosity, you see.

At the age of seven they had to cut Henry down. He had been swinging from a clothesline that had been strung in the basement, drying the family wash. Henry had been curious what it felt like to strangle.

By the time he was nineteen, Henry had read every volume of the "Encyclopedia Britannica," copious texts on every phase of the sciences, all matter disseminated by the government for the past twenty-eight years, and biographies by the score. Also, somewhere between five thousand, eight hundred, and five thousand, nine hundred books on history, religion, and sociology. He avoided books of cartoons—and novels.

By the time he was twenty, Henry had a pair of marvelously thick-lensed glasses, and migraine headaches.

However, his all-consuming curiosity had not been satiated.

On the very day of his thirty-first birthday, Henry was unmarried and digging for bits of a stone tablet in the remains of a lost city somewhere near the Dead Sea. Curiosity.

It would be safe to remark that Henry Leclair was curious about practically everything. He wondered why a woman wore red feathers in her hat, rather than green ones. He wondered why lobsters turned red when they were cooked. He wondered why office buildings did not have thirteenth floors. He wondered why men left home. He wondered what the soot-accumulation rate in his city was. He wondered why he had a strawberry mark on his right knee. He wondered all sorts of things.

Curiosity, don't you see.

You're the one.

"I'm the one?" Henry blurted incredulously. "Me? I'm the *what*? *What* am I? What the blazes are you talking about?" he asked the unresponding fortune paper.

This was a conundrum Henry knew, deep in his soul-matter, he must solve. Two such fortunes—two such in-

comprehensible mind-troublers—were more than mere coyness on someone's part. There was something not quite right here. *Something*, as Henry put it to himself, *more than meets the eye!*

Henry was prone to cliché.

Though not precisely ominous to his view, it was definitely worth investigation. *Everything* was worth investigation to Henry Leclair. Inside, he was glowing: a new quest!

On the next semi-visible passing of his waiter, Henry yelled out, "Waiter! Waiter!"

The short, almost bald, and overly-contemptuous Oriental passed twice more—once in either direction—finally coming to a halt before Henry's booth. Henry extended the two fortunes and said, "Who writes these?"

The waiter smiled with a touch of impudence and said nothing.

"I beg your pardon," Henry apologized, removing his marvelously thick-lensed glasses and dangling them in his other hand.

The waiter wrinkled his nose in distaste, stroked his arm-draped napkin, and pointed to the manager, lounging half-asleep behind the cash register.

"Thanks," said Henry ab-

sently, his attention to the chase now directed elsewhere. He started to rise as the waiter turned. "Oh,—check, please," he added. The waiter stopped dead in his tracks, drew his shoulders up as though he had been struck an especially foul blow, and returned to the table. He hurriedly scribbled the check, all in hieroglyphs save the total, and plunked it on the table. Muttering Eastern epithets he stalked away.

Henry absently dropped the remaining cookie in his jacket pocket, as he picked up the check—so anxious was he now to speak to the manager. Quickly slapping his hat on his head, he gathered his topcoat to him, dropping a quarter on the table, and made for the manager. That worthy slumped across the glass case, one arm securely pressed against the cash register's drawer. He awakened at almost the instant Henry stopped before him. His hand extended automatically for check and cash.

While the fellow was placing his check on a spindle, Henry leaned across and asked, quietly, "Say, can you tell me where you get these little fortunes?" He expected more misdirection and confusion,

as he had experienced with the waiter, but the Chinese manager did not take his eyes off the change he was delivering as he said, "We buy in lots from trading company that sells us cookies. You want to buy dozen, take home with you?"

Harry fended him off, and asked the name and address of the company. After a few seconds of deliberation, the manager reached out of sight under the counter, dragged forth a large notebook. He opened it, ran a finger down a column of addresses, said, "The Saigon-San Francisco Trading Company, 431 Bessemer Street."

Harry thanked him and strode out onto the sidewalk. "Taxi!" he called into the river of passing cars, and a few minutes later was riding toward 431 Bessemer Street. Curiosity, don't you see.

The Saigon-San Francisco Trading Company was located in a condemned warehouse on the lower end of Bessemer Street. In the manufacturing and warehouse section of the city, Bessemer Street was regarded with disdain. On Bessemer Street the lower end was regarded much the same. Henry had an idea this building was the last

rung on the ladder of aversion.

The windows, for the most part, were broken, sightless, and boarded up. The building itself leaned far out of plumb, as though it were seeking support from something on its West side. The West side faced an empty lot.

So, for that matter, did the East, North, and South sides.

"A pretty sorry place for an active trading company," murmured Henry with conviction. He pulled his coat collar up about his ears. The wind plunging through the darkened warehouse canyons was chilling, this late at night. Henry glanced at his wrist watch. Ten o'clock.

"Um. Probably no one here, but at least I can get an idea of what the place is like, as long as I'm here." He mentally kicked himself for taking off in such a flurry of desire to solve the riddle of the fortune papers.

He walked across the street, stepping quickly in and out of the smudge of light thrown by a lone street lamp.

Far off, back the way they had come, he could see the rapidly disappearing tail light of the taxi.

"Why the devil didn't I ask him to wait?" Henry booted himself again. Now he would

have to walk to the nearest hack stand.

The building loomed over him. He went up to the front door. Locked solid; steel bolts welded to the frame.

"Hmm. Locked up for good." He glanced up at the dirty CONDEMNED sign beside the door. "Odd," he muttered uncertainly.

There were fresh truck tire-tread marks in the mud of the street. The tracks led around the back of the warehouse. Henry found his interest in this problem mounting, rather than waning at the desertedness of the place.

He walked around to the rear of the warehouse, followed the truck tracks. They stopped beside a number of square indentations in the mud. "Somebody left a bunch of crates here," Henry decided, after examining the imprints.

He looked around. The rear of the building looked worse than the front—if that was possible. All but one of the windows was boarded, and that one—

Henry realized he was looking at a light, streaming through that window on the top floor. It was blanked out for a moment, then came back. As though someone had walked in front of it. "But

that light's in the *ceiling*!" Henry gasped aloud. "I can see the edge of the fixture from here. How could anyone walk in front of it?"

His wonderment was cut short by still further signs of life in the building. A circular opening in the wall next to the window—quite dark and obviously a pipe-shaft of some sort—was emitting large puffs of faintly phosphorescent green fog.

"There's someone up there, I'm sure," Henry concluded, not incorrectly. "There must be someone or something!"

The Urge rose in Henry Leclair once more. The puzzle had multiplied itself, and had multiplied its interest value to Henry as well. The problem thumped and bobbed in his mind. *Tuesday*, is it? *You're the one*, you say? Where there's an inquisitiveness, there's a method. Henry Leclair's caution went South for the Winter.

He carefully examined the rear of the building. No doors. But a first-floor window was broken, and the boards were loose. As quietly as possible, he disengaged the nail's grip on the sill, and wiggled the boards off. Dragging two old crates from the garbage behind the ware-

house, Henry piled them and climbed into the building.

It was pitch, night, ebony, lusterless, without qualification *dark* inside. Henry held his pipe lighter aloft and rasped it, letting the flame illuminate the place for a few seconds.

Broken crates, old newspapers, cobwebs, dust. The place looked deserted. But there *had* been the light from above.

He sought out the elevator. Useless. He sought out the stairs. Bricked off. He sat down on the floor. Annoyed.

Then the sound of glugging came to him.

Glug. Glug. Glug. Then a sort of washed-out, whimpery glug that even Henry could tell was a defective: Gluuuu-uug!

"*Plummis!*" swore a voice in high falsetto.

Henry listened for a minute more, but no other sound came to him. "Oh, that was cursing, all right," murmured Henry to himself. "I don't know who's doing it, or where it's coming from, but that's unquestionably someone's equivalent of a damn or hell!" He leaped to his feet, began searching for the source of the voice.

As he neared one wall, the

voice came again. "*Plummis, sughutch, valts er webbel er webbel er webbel . . .*" the voice trailed off into muttered webbels.

Henry looked up. There was light shining through a circular hole in the ceiling; very faintly shining. He stepped directly under it to assay a clearer view . . .

. . . and was yanked bodily and immediately up through many such holes in many such ceilings, till his head came into violent contact with a burnished metal plate in the ceiling of the top floor.

"*Aaargh!*" moaned Henry, falling to the floor, away from the hole, clutching his banged head, clutching his crushed hat.

"*Serves you qquasper!*" the high, falsetto voice remonstrated. Henry looked around. The room was filled with strangely-shaped machines resting on metal workbenches. They were all humming, clicking, gasping, winking and glugging efficiently. All, that is, but one, which emitted a normal *glug*, then subsided into a fit of prolonged *gluuuuuuging*.

"*Plummis!*" the falsetto swore vehemently.

Henry looked around once more. The room was empty. He glanced up toward the

ceiling. The unie was sitting crosslegged in the air, about six inches under the roof.

"You're . . ." the rest caught somewhere in Henry's throat.

"I'm Eggzaborg. You'd call me a unie, if you had the intelligence to call me," the unie finished for Leclair.

"You're . . ." Henry tried again.

"I'm invading Earth," the unie completed the thought for Henry, even though that was not what Henry had been thinking.

Henry took a closer look at the unie, adjusting his marvelously thick-lensed glasses on his nose.

He was a little thing, no more than two feet tall, almost a gnome, with long, knobby arms and legs, a pointed head and huge, blue, owl-like eyes. He had one fragile antenna swaying up from the center of his forehead. It ended in a feather. A light-blue feather. *Almost robin's egg blue*, Henry thought inanely, then went back to his observations.

The unie's nose was thin and straight, overhanging a tight line of mouth, and bracketed by fat, puffy cheeks. He had no eyebrows and—it appeared—no eyelids. His ears were pointed

and set very high on his skull. He was hairless.

The unie wore a form-fitting suit of bright yellow, and pinned to the breast was a monstrous button, half the size of his chest, which quite plainly read:

CONQUEROR.

The unie caught Henry's gaze on the button. "Souvenir. Made it up for myself. Can't help being pompous once in a while," he said, somewhat sheepishly. "Quite attractive, though, don't you think?"

Henry closed his eyes very tightly, using both hands. He wrinkled his forehead, letting his marvelously thick-lensed glasses slide down his pronounced nose, just a bit, to unfocus the unie, should he open his eyes again. "I am not well," he said, matter-of-factly.

The high, falsetto broke into chirping laughter.

"Well enough *now*!" Eggzaborg chortled. "But just wait three thousand years—just wait!" Henry opened his left eye a slit. Eggzaborg was rolling helplessly around in the air, clutching a place on his body roughly where his abdomen should have been. The unie bumped lightly against the ceiling in his revelry.

A thin shower of plaster fell across Henry's face. He felt the cool tickle of it on his eyelids and nose. *That plaster, thought Henry, was real. Ergo, this unie must be real.*

I guess, he added in a troubled afterthought.

"You are real!" stated Henry forcefully, getting to his feet.

"What *amazing* concepts you are capable of!" the unie replied, both sarcastically and ungrammatically.

"You wrote these fortunes?" Henry inquired, holding them up for the unie to see.

"Fortunes?" the unie spoke to himself. "For . . . oh! You must mean the mentality-crushers I've been putting in the cookies!" He rubbed long, thin fingers together. "I *knew*, I say, I just *knew* they would produce results!" He looked sad for a moment, sighed, "Things have been so slow. I've actually wondered once or twice if I'm really succeeding."

He let his shoulders slump, and folded his knobby hands in his lap, looking wistfully at Henry Leclair. "Poor thing," he said.

Henry ignored him for a moment, deciding to unravel this as he unraveled every-

thing in his search for information: calmly and with first things—obviously—first. Since the unie's comments were baffling in the light of any conquests Henry had ever encountered, he decided to examine elsewhere before considering them.

He walked over to the machines.

A tube-like apparatus mounted on a round casing was spitting, through an orifice, buttons. The buttons were of varying sizes, colors, shapes. They all fell into a trough with holes, graded themselves, and plunged through attached tubes into cartons on the floor. Henry blinked once.

The second machine seemed to be grinding a thin line between the head and shank of two-penny nails. The small buzz-wheel ground away while the nail spun, held by pincers. As soon as an almost invisible line had been worn on the metal, the nail dropped into a bucket. This time Henry's blink was doubled.

The other machines were performing equally incomprehensible actions. One was all angles and glass sheets, leading to the hole in the wall Henry had seen from below. It was glugging frantically.

The puffs of glowing green fog were still erupting sporadically.

"That one wilts lettuce," Eggzaborg pointed out.

"It *what*?" Henry spun, looking up at the unie with incredulousness.

The unie looked shocked. "You didn't think lettuce wilted of its own accord, did you?"

Henry bumbled, "Well, I—that is—doesn't it?"

"Poor thing," the unie repeated, looking even more wistful than before. Pity shone in his eyes.

Henry felt this was the moment to begin unraveling the problem. First, since the unie was obviously not human, he would have to handle things carefully. He was dealing with an alien intellect. He must never forget that. Probably a highly dangerous alien intellect. (Though to be frank, the unie didn't *look* very dangerous. But then, one couldn't tell with these alien intellects.)

"All right, then," challenged Henry, "so you wilt lettuce. So what? How does that help you conquer Earth?" The shocks of the past few minutes had deadened Henry's sense of wonder a bit. He hardly considered the oddness of talking about anything as

commonplace to the unie as invading Earth.

"Disorganization," the unie answered in a deeply significant tone of voice, pointing a stick finger at Henry. "Disorganization and demoralization! Cuts under you! Strikes at the very fibers of security! Heh!" - He chuckled several times, folded his hands again.

Henry began to realize just how alien this alien's thought-processes *really* were. Though he didn't recognize the psychological significance of wilted lettuce, it obviously meant something big to the unie. He marked it down in his mind.

Still, he was getting nowhere. He decided to try another angle, to get the unie to talk. "I don't get this at all," Henry said. "I don't believe it. You're just a demented magician or—or something. You aren't what you say at all. By the way," he added more politely, "what *are* you?"

The unie leaped to his feet in the air, bumping his pointed head on the ceiling. More plaster sifted down. "*Plum-mis*" cursed the little being, massaging his skull. His antenna had begun to wilt appreciably.

He was furious. "You dare

to question the motives, machinations, efficiency and . . . and . . ." he groped for a word, "power of Eggzaborg!" His face, which was a normal off-blue, had slowly turned a fierce aquamarine. "Fool, dolt, imbecile, clod, bumpkin, jerk!" The words rolled off his tongue, spattered in Henry's face. Henry cringed; he had always maintained a dislike for cursing.

He had begun to think this was the wrong approach.

He became certain as his feet left the floor and he found himself hanging upside-down in the air, vibrating madly, all the change and keys and bismuth tablets cascading from his pockets, clunking him on their way down. "S-s-s-stop! P-p-please s-s-s-stop!" begged Henry, twisting about in the air like a defective mixmaster. "U-u-uggedy-ug-ug!" he ugged as the unie began to bounce him. With little regard for the status of the part on Henry's hair, the unie pile-drove the human's head against the floor with numerous rapid clunks.

Suddenly, it stopped. Henry felt his legs unstiffen, and he somersaulted over onto the floor, lying face up, quite a bit the worse for being handled.

He was puffing with agony, when the unie's face floated into his range of vision.

"Terribly sorry," the unie said, looking down. He appeared to be sincerely concerned about his actions. "It's just a result of waiting all these years. Six hundred years waiting for relief on a conquest-shift would make anyone edgy. I'm a hundred and fifty years due for relief." He sighed, bit what little there was of his lips, sank into silent glumness.

Henry felt a bit of his strength coming back. At least enough—it was the first thing that he wanted to do, of course—to ask a few questions:

"T-tell me the story, E-Eggzaborg," Henry trembled, a shaking hand raised toward the ceiling-skimming unie. The little blue being stared down for a moment, and Henry could see the battle raging inside his mind.

Should he tell the human anything? Ordinarily, no—but he had just lost his temper, shown his strain, and in a small way the Code of Ethics of the unie must be met. He owed the human an apology (ignominious thought though it was), and this might serve.

Eggzaborg came to a float-

ing halt above the prostrated Henry Leclair. "Well . . ." he began, with reluctance to talk to this cretinous human. "The story is simple. I graduated with honors from Pepham. I am a unie. I was thus assigned to—"

Henry cut him off, "What is a unie; where did you come from?"

The unie purpled again, and Henry felt, with growing terror, his body twitch, as though it were about to rise again. But it didn't, and he knew the unie had brought his temper under control. "Dammit, man! Let me finish! Stop your blasphemous interrupting!"

Henry quickly motioned him to continue, calming him with the same movement.

Eggzaborg then resumed, "Space, moron. Space. I came from space. Now don't interrupt—I come from out there where you have no idea a place exists. Both in space and in between layers of space. I am here because—I am here because—well, dammit, fellow, I'm here to *conquer*!" He waved his antenna helplessly, at a loss to embellish the explanation.

"But why?"

"Why? Why? How ignorant can you be? I'm a unie! What does that make you

think of?" he seemed about to explode.

"Fried shrimp," replied Henry, being honest.

"Ooooooh!" the unie hurtled about the room, barely missing collision with walls and machines. "The impertinence! *That's* one of the reasons I've stayed so well hidden! I can't stand the stupidity of you people! When you think of *unie* you just naturally think of *conquest*!" *That*, substantially, seemed to be that.

"I do?" asked Henry, still not quite convinced.

The unie subsided into muted cursings.

Henry decided to try flattery. "You speak English very well," he ventured, politely.

"Why shouldn't I?" snapped the unie. "I invented it!"

That quieted Henry again. He wasn't quite sure for a moment whether he was lying on floor or ceiling.

"Anyhow," the unie tried again, looking at Henry with piercing eyes, daring him to interrupt, "I was graduated in a large class. There was much talk that year (though we don't judge by your years, of course) of the coming Flib. Though I thought it was superfluous exhalations, I was worried by the rapidity with

which my classmates were being sent out. When *my* placket was oiled and I knew I was to go out, all other thoughts fled from my head.

"Now I've been here a hundred and fifty years longer than my shift, and I can't contact the Lephmaster. It's not that I'm worried," he hastened to add, "it's just that I'd like a drink of yerbl."

"If you've been here six hundred years," asked Henry, beginning to rise to a sitting position, "why haven't you conquered us already?"

The unie looked at him strangely. "Who ever heard of conquering in less than four thousand years. It wouldn't be ethical." He pouted and shined his button with an arm.

Henry decided to risk another edgy question: "But how can writing cookie fortunes and wilting lettuce conquer us?"

"That isn't *all* I do," responded the unie. "Why, I make people smile (that's *very* important), and I rust water pipes, and I make pigs' tails curl, and I cure colds, and I make shingles fall off roofs, and I stop wars, and I dirty white shoes, and I—" He seemed intending to continue for some time, but Henry, confused, stopped him.

"Excuse my interruption," he said, "but I don't understand. There's probably a point I've missed. What's the overall plan?"

The unie threw up his hands in exasperation, and Henry noticed for the first time that the alien had only four fingers on each.

"That plan has been used for millennia, by the unies," the litle being said, "and no one has understood it but the top Lephmasters. How the blazes do you expect me to explain anything as complicated as that to a buffoon like you? That plan was formulated to handle four thousand years of exigencies, and you want a run-down in four sentences! Utter imbecile!"

"You've been here six hundred years," muttered Henry in awe.

"Yes. Rather clever the way I've kept out of sight, don't you think?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know," Henry felt a spark of belligerence burning, from his bouncing, "I'll bet you're the basis for all the legends about gnomes, and flying saucers, too. Not such a hot job if you ask me."

He spread his hands in unhappiness. "There are bound to be tiny slip-ups in six hundred years. "Particularly

with the defective screens on those damned raw-material trucks I use. They're pretty old now, and every once in a while someone will see one coming or going."

Then, what the unie had said a minute before, suddenly sank through to Henry's conscious: "You say you stop wars?" Amazement rang in his voice.

"Certainly. How else can I conquer you? If you keep killing each other off, what'll be left for me to conquer?" He looked at Henry appealingly, "I do wish you'd stop that nonsense."

Henry felt his brain begin to crawl around inside his skull in confusion. Ostensibly, this unie was here to conquer the Earth. At least, that was what he kept saying. Yet he wasn't using standard technique. Any would-be tyrants Henry had ever read about had always encouraged inner strife. The unie seemed to have his wires crossed. Henry asked him: "Are you sure you're supposed to *stop* wars?"

"Certainly!" the unie responded with conviction.

Henry finally decided it was the reverse-thinking of the strange alien intellect. He couldn't fathom it, but it

seemed like a good deal for humanity.

"What are those button and nail machines over there doing?" asked Henry.

"Those are implement-cripplers," the unie confided. "Have you never stopped to wonder why you still use buttons, rather than—for instance—clasps, clamps, zippers, seams and other much better contrivances. The button is easily lost, loses its center when sent through the laundry, breaks thread, isn't very attractive, and is difficult to open and close. Ever wonder why you still use them?" He didn't wait for Henry to answer. "Because I keep sifting supplies of them into stores, and they have to sell them, and that creates more of a demand."

Again, Henry saw a certain indefinable insidiousness in the whole trend of the proposition, but he didn't see how it was so bad. He shrugged mentally, vocally urging the unie to continue.

"The nails are treated so they go in at angles. You ever see anyone who could hit ten consecutive nails into a piece of wood straight? That's our little machine over there." He pointed with obvious pride to the busily grinding nail-sabotager.

"The other machine, the square one, helps keep the birth-rate up, to offset the death-rate in your wars." He looked at Henry sternly. "It puts pin-sized holes in pro—"

Henry blanched, cut him off quickly. "Er—that's all right, Eggzaborg. I—I believe you. I understand."

Then Henry asked, "But what about those fortunes? Why the weird messages?"

"Demoralization. See how they bothered you? Just think of a million people opening fortune cookies and finding the message, 'Tuesday,' inside! What do you think happens to their frame of mind? They don't know it, but it unnerves them for the rest of the week."

"Do they all say 'Tuesday'?"

"The dated ones do. That's the only day I'm sure there will be no Flib." He shuddered. Henry didn't know what a Flib was, but the unie certainly seemed to be bothered by it. "Oh, I'm so pleased they're getting results! I think I'll step up production."

He walked down the air, to a flat, snakey machine, and punched a tip at one end. The machine began to *wonkle*.

Wonkle, wonkle, wonkle. "*Plummis!*" Eggzaborg then swore, dealing the machine a

vicious kick. The machine wonkled once more in agony, then began winking.

Eggzaborg looked relieved. "You'd think the damned equipment would hold up better. It's only about a thousand years old. We don't judge in years, of course," he reminded Henry again.

"Why are you bothering to tell me all this?" asked Henry, suddenly frightened.

The unie settled back in its cross-legged crouch. "Why not? I won't be here in another ten minutes, and you'll never find me again. Besides, who'd believe you if you told them what you'd seen? You people are such moles."

He began to laugh. High, thin, squeaky. It rasped in Henry's nerves.

Henry lost his temper with flashing poor judgment. "You, sir," he began, from a lifetime of practicing the amenities, "are a charlatan and an egotistical . . ."

He never finished the epithet. Suddenly every coin in his pockets—every coin that was left from his previous jouncing—became screeching hot; every hair on his body developed a life of its own, wanting to leave the sanctity of his frame; the soles of his shoes became peanut butter;

his nose began to run; his pen leaked through his shirt. All at once.

Then he turned upside-down, downside-up in the air again, and began to experience alternate hot and cold waves.

"You know something," the unie said, quietly, "if I didn't want to conquer you nosey slobs so much, I'd—I'd *kill* the lot of you. You're an arrogant . . . *human being!*" He said the last, much as Henry would have said leprosy.

"Now beat it!" said the unie. "Just wait three thousand years—you'll see!"

An instant later, Henry found himself in an apartment at 6991 Parry Avenue, 5th Floor, sharing a bathtub with a very small girl and her three plastic ducks. He sputtered several times, quacked once in hopes it might distract someone enough so they would not notice he wasn't a duck, clambered from the tub, and was shortly thereafter taken under arrest, dripping—and no longer curious.

The cell was drafty, and Henry was certain he was coming down with a beastly case of the flu.

He was still confused by the entire escapade, but was desperately trying to cling to

the impression that things were better than most people thought.

Somehow, either because the unie had been sent out from the Lapham (whatever the devil *that* was!) too quickly, or because he had gone mad being left here too long, or perhaps just because of the normal alien intellect viewpoint, Humanity was getting help from outside.

The unie hated war, and tried to stop it. If that was conquest, well, *me for conquest—wheee!*

His ruminations were cut short by his stomach's ruminations. Earlier that day the inmates of cell block 4 had gone downstairs to lunch, and even though Henry had smiled at the scrap of wilted lettuce in his plate, he was still hungry.

Then the remembrance of the third fortune cookie in his pocket made him smile. Dessert! The guards had left it in his jacket when they had searched him and taken his belt and glasses and personal possessions.

He fished it out.

He pulled at the fortune and read it. He remembered what the unie had said about the Flib. The fortune didn't say *Tuesday* at all. It said:

Wednesday.

THE END

To escape from Mars, all Clayton had to do was the impossible. Break out of a crack-proof exile camp—get onto a ship that couldn't be boarded—smash through an impenetrable wall of steel. Perhaps he could do all these things, but he discovered that Mars did evil things to men; that he wasn't even Clayton any more. He was only—

THE MAN WHO HATED MARS

By RANDALL GARRETT



"I WANT you to put me in prison!" the big, hairy man said in a trembling voice.

He was addressing his request to a thin woman sitting behind a desk that seemed much too big for her. The plaque on the desk said:

LT. PHOEBE HARRIS
TERRAN REHABILITA-
TION SERVICE

Lieutenant Harris glanced

at the man before her for only a moment before she returned her eyes to the dossier on the desk; but long enough to verify the impression his voice had given. Ron Clayton was a big, ugly, cowardly, dangerous man.

He said: "Well? Dammit, say something!"

The lieutenant raised her eyes again. "Just be patient until I've read this." Her voice and eyes were expressionless,



The frightful carnage would go down in the bloody history of space.

but her hand moved beneath the desk.

Clayton froze. *She's yellow!* he thought. She's turned on the trackers! He could see the pale greenish glow of their little eyes watching him all around the room. If he made any fast move, they would cut him down with a stun beam before he could get two feet.

She had thought he was going to jump her. *Little rat!* he thought, *somebody ought to slap her down!*

He watched her check through the heavy dossier in front of her. Finally, she looked up at him again.

"Clayton, your last conviction was for strongarm robbery. You were given a choice between prison on Earth and freedom here on Mars. You picked Mars."

He nodded slowly. He'd been broke and hungry at the time. A sneaky little rat named Johnson had bilked Clayton out of his fair share of the Corey payroll job, and Clayton had been forced to get the money somehow. He hadn't mussed the guy up much; besides, it was the sucker's own fault. If he hadn't tried to yell—

Lieutenant Harris went on: "I'm afraid you can't back down now."

"But it isn't fair! The most

I'd have got on that frame-up would've been ten years. I've been here fifteen already!"

"I'm sorry, Clayton. It can't be done. You're here. Period. Forget about trying to get back. Earth doesn't want you." Her voice sounded choppy, as though she were trying to keep it calm.

Clayton broke into a whining rage. "You can't do that! It isn't fair! I never did anything to you! I'll go talk to the Governor! He'll listen to reason! You'll see! I'll—"

"*Shut up!*" the woman snapped harshly. "I'm getting sick of it! I personally think you should have been locked up—permanently. I think this idea of forced colonization is going to breed trouble for Earth someday, but it is about the only way you can get anybody to colonize this frozen hunk of mud.

"Just keep it in mind that I don't like it any better than you do—and *I didn't strong-arm anybody to deserve the assignment!* Now get out of here!"

She moved a hand threateningly toward the manual controls of the stun beam.

Clayton retreated fast. The trackers ignored anyone walking away from the desk; they were set only to spot threatening movements toward it.

Outside the Rehabilitation Service Building, Clayton could feel the tears running down the inside of his face mask. He'd asked again and again—God only knew how many times—in the past fifteen years. Always the same answer. No.

When he'd heard that this new administrator was a woman, he'd hoped she might be easier to convince. She wasn't. If anything, she was harder than the others.

The heat-sucking frigidity of the thin Martian air whispered around him in a feeble breeze. He shivered a little and began walking toward the recreation center.

There was a high, thin piping in the sky above him which quickly became a scream in the thin air.

He turned for a moment to watch the ship land, squinting his eyes to see the number on the hull.

Fifty-two. Space Transport Ship Fifty-two.

Probably bringing another load of poor suckers to freeze to death on Mars.

That was the thing he hated about Mars—the cold. The everlasting damned cold! And the oxidation pills; take one every three hours or smother in the poor, thin air.

The government could have

put up domes; it could have put in building-to-building tunnels, at least. It could have done a hell of a lot of things to make Mars a decent place for human beings.

But no—the government had other ideas. A bunch of bigshot scientific characters had come up with the idea nearly twenty-three years before. Clayton could remember the words on the sheet he had been given when he was sentenced.

"Mankind is inherently an adaptable animal. If we are to colonize the planets of the Solar System, we must meet the conditions on those planets as best we can.

"Financially, it is impracticable to change an entire planet from its original condition to one which will support human life as it exists on terra.

"But man, since he is adaptable, can change himself—modify his structure slightly—so that he can live on these planets with only a minimum of change in the environment."

So they made you live outside and like it. So you froze and you choked and you suffered.

Clayton hated Mars. He hated the thin air and the

cold. More than anything, he hated the cold.

Ron Clayton wanted to go home.

The Recreation Building was just ahead; at least it would be warm inside. He pushed in through the outer and inner doors, and he heard the burst of music from the jukebox. His stomach tightened up into a hard cramp.

They were playing Heinelein's *Green Hills of Earth*.

There was almost no other sound in the room, although it was full of people. There were plenty of colonists who claimed to like Mars, but even they were silent when that song was played.

Clayton wanted to go over and smash the machine—make it stop reminding him. He clenched his teeth and his fists and his eyes and cursed mentally. *God, how I hate Mars!*

When the hauntingly nostalgic last chorus faded away, he walked over to the machine and fed it full of enough coins to keep it going on something else until he left.

At the bar, he ordered a beer and used it to wash down another oxidation tablet. It wasn't good beer; it didn't even deserve the name. The atmospheric pressure was so

low as to boil all the carbon dioxide out of it, so the brewers never put it back in after fermentation.

He was sorry for what he had done—really and truly sorry. If they'd only give him one more chance, he'd make good. Just one more chance. He'd work things out.

He'd promised himself that both times they'd put him up before, but things had been different then. He hadn't really been given another chance, what with parole boards and all.

Clayton closed his eyes and finished the beer. He ordered another.

He'd worked in the mines for fifteen years. It wasn't that he minded work really, but the foreman had it in for him. Always giving him a bad time; always picking out the lousy jobs for him.

Like the time he'd crawled into a side-boring in Tunnel 12 for a nap during lunch and the foreman had caught him. When he promised never to do it again if the foreman wouldn't put it on report, the guy said, "Yeah. Sure. Hate to hurt a guy's record."

Then he'd put Clayton on report anyway. Strictly a rat.

Not that Clayton ran any chance of being fired; they never fired anybody. But

they'd fined him a day's pay. A whole day's pay.

He tapped his glass on the bar, and the barman came over with another beer. Clayton looked at it, then up at the barman. "Put a head on it."

The bartender looked at him sourly. "I've got some soapsuds here, Clayton, and one of these days I'm gonna put some in your beer if you keep pulling that gag."

That was the trouble with some guys. No sense of humor.

Somebody came in the door and then somebody else came in behind him, so that both inner and outer doors were open for an instant. A blast of icy breeze struck Clayton's back, and he shivered. He started to say something, then changed his mind; the doors were already closed again, and besides, one of the guys was bigger than he was.

The iciness didn't seem to go away immediately. It was like the mine. Little old Mars was cold clear down to her core—or at least down as far as they'd drilled. The walls were frozen and seemed to radiate a chill that pulled the heat right out of your blood.

Somebody was playing *Green Hills* again, damn them. Evidently all of his own selec-

tions had run out earlier than he'd thought they would.

Hell! There was nothing to do here. He might as well go home.

"Gimme another beer, Mac."

He'd go home as soon as he finished this one.

He stood there with his eyes closed, listening to the music and hating Mars.

A voice next to him said: "I'll have a whiskey."

The voice sounded as if the man had a bad cold, and Clayton turned slowly to look at him. After all the sterilization they went through before they left Earth, nobody on Mars ever had a cold, so there was only one thing that would make a man's voice sound like that.

Clayton was right. The fellow had an oxygen tube clamped firmly over his nose. He was wearing the uniform of the Space Transport Service.

"Just get in on the ship?" Clayton asked conversationally.

The man nodded and grinned. "Yeah. Four hours before we take off again." He poured down the whiskey. "Sure cold out."

Clayton agreed. "It's always cold." He watched en-

viously as the spaceman ordered another whiskey.

Clayton couldn't afford whiskey. He probably could have by this time, if the mines had made him a foreman, like they should have.

Maybe he could talk the spaceman out of a couple of drinks.

"My name's Clayton. Ron Clayton."

The spaceman took the offered hand. "Mine's Parkinson, but everybody calls me Parks."

"Sure, Parks. Uh—can I buy you a beer?"

Parks shook his head. "No, thanks. I started on whiskey. Here, let me buy you one."

"Well—thanks. Don't mind if I do."

They drank them in silence, and Parks ordered two more.

"Been here long?" Parks asked.

"Fifteen years. Fifteen long, long years."

"Did you—uh—I mean—" Parks looked suddenly confused.

Clayton glanced quickly to make sure the bartender was out of earshot. Then he grinned. "You mean am I a convict? Nah. I came here because I wanted to. But—" He lowered his voice. "—we don't talk about it around here. You know." He gestured with one

hand—a gesture that took in everyone else in the room.

Parks glanced around quickly, moving only his eyes. "Yeah. I see," he said softly.

"This your first trip?" asked Clayton.

"First one to Mars. Been on the Luna run a long time."

"Low pressure bother you much?"

"Not much. We only keep it at six pounds in the ships. Half helium and half oxygen. Only thing that bothers me is the oxy here. Or rather, the oxy that *isn't* here." He took a deep breath through his nose tube to emphasize his point.

Clayton clamped his teeth together, making the muscles at the side of his jaw stand out.

Parks didn't notice. "You guys have to take those pills, don't you?"

"Yeah."

"I had to take them once. Got stranded on Luna. The cat I was in broke down eighty some miles from Aristarchus Base and I had to walk back—with my oxy low. Well, I figured—"

Clayton listened to Parks' story with a great show of attention, but he had heard it before. This "lost on the moon" stuff and its variations

had been going the rounds for forty years. Every once in a while, it actually did happen to someone; just often enough to keep the story going.

This guy did have a couple of new twists, but not enough to make the story worthwhile.

"Boy," Clayton said when Parks had finished, "you were lucky to come out of that alive!"

Parks nodded, well pleased with himself, and bought another round of drinks.

"Something like that happened to me a couple of years ago," Clayton began. "I'm supervisor on the third shift in the mines at Xanthe, but at the time, I was only a foreman. One day, a couple of guys went to a branch tunnel to—"

It was a very good story. Clayton had made it up himself, so he knew that Parks had never heard it before. It was gory in just the right places, with a nice effect at the end.

"—so I had to hold up the rocks with my back while the rescue crew pulled the others out of the tunnel by crawling between my legs. Finally, they got some steel beams down there to take the load off, and I could let go. I was in the hospital for a week," he finished.

Parks was nodding vaguely. Clayton looked up at the clock above the bar and realized that they had been talking for better than an hour. Parks was buying another round.

Parks was a hell of a nice fellow.

There was, Clayton found, only one trouble with Parks. He got to talking so loud that the bartender refused to serve either one of them any more.

The bartender said Clayton was getting loud, too, but it was just because he had to talk loud to make Parks hear him.

Clayton helped Parks put his mask and parka on and they walked out into the cold night.

Parks began to sing *Green Hills*. About halfway through, he stopped and turned to Clayton.

"I'm from Indiana."

Clayton had already spotted him as an American by his accent.

"Indiana? That's nice. Real nice."

"Yeah. You talk about green hills, we got green hills in Indiana. What time is it?"

Clayton told him.

"Jeez-krise! Ol' spaship takes off in an hour. Ought to have one more drink first."

Clayton realized he didn't

like Parks. But maybe he'd buy a bottle.

Sharkie Johnson worked in Fuels Section, and he made a nice little sideline of stealing alcohol, cutting it, and selling it. He thought it was real funny to call it Martian Gin.

Clayton said: "Let's go over to Sharkie's. Sharkie will sell us a bottle."

"Okay," said Parks. "We'll get a bottle. That's what we need: a bottle."

It was quite a walk to the Shark's place. It was so cold that even Parks was beginning to sober up a little. He was laughing like hell when Clayton started to sing.

"We're going over to the Shark's

To buy a jug of gin for Parks!

Hi ho, hi ho, hi ho!"

One thing about a few drinks; you didn't get so cold. You didn't feel it too much, anyway.

The Shark still had his light on when they arrived. Clayton whispered to Parks: "I'll go in. He knows me. He wouldn't sell it if you were around. You got eight credits?"

"Sure I got eight credits. Just a minute, and I'll give you eight credits." He fished

around for a minute inside his parka, and pulled out his notecase. His gloved fingers were a little clumsy, but he managed to get out a five and three ones and hand them to Clayton.

"You wait out here," Clayton said.

He went in through the outer door and knocked on the inner one. He should have asked for ten credits. Sharkie only charged five, and that would leave him three for himself. But he could have got ten—maybe more.

When he came out with the bottle, Parks was sitting on a rock, shivering.

"Jeez-krise!" he said. "It's cold out here. Let's get to someplace where it's warm."

"Sure. I got the bottle. Want a drink?"

Parks took the bottle, opened it, and took a good belt out of it.

"Hooh!" he breathed. "Pretty smooth."

As Clayton drank, Parks said: "Hey! I better get back to the field! I know! We can go to the men's room and finish the bottle before the ship takes off! Isn't that a good idea? It's warm there."

They started back down the street toward the spacefield.

"Yep, I'm from Indiana. Southern part, down around

Bloomington," Parks said. "Gimme the jug. Not Bloomington, Illinois — Bloomington, Indiana. We really got green hills down there." He drank, and handed the bottle back to Clayton. "Pers-nally, I don't see why anybody'd stay on Mars. Here y'are, practic'ly on the equator in the middle of the summer, and it's colder than hell. Brrr!

"Now if you was smart, you'd go home, where it's warm. Mars wasn't built for people to live on, anyhow. I don't see how you stand it."

That was when Clayton decided he really hated Parks.

And when Parks said: "Why be dumb, friend? Why-n't you go home?" Clayton kicked him in the stomach, hard.

"And that, that—" Clayton said as Parks doubled over.

He said it again as he kicked him in the head. And in the ribs. Parks was gasping as he writhed on the ground, but he soon lay still.

Then Clayton saw why. Parks' nose tube had come off when Clayton's foot struck his head.

Parks was breathing heavily, but he wasn't getting any oxygen.

That was when the Big Idea hit Ron Clayton. With a nosepiece on like that, you

couldn't tell who a man was. He took another drink from the jug and then began to take Parks' clothes off.

The uniform fit Clayton fine, and so did the nose mask. He dumped his own clothing on top of Parks' nearly nude body, adjusted the little oxygen tank so that the gas would flow properly through the mask, took the first deep breath of good air he'd had in fifteen years, and walked toward the spacefield.

He went into the men's room at the Port Building, took a drink, and felt in the pockets of the uniform for Parks' identification. He found it and opened the booklet. It read:

PARKINSON, HERBERT J.
Steward 2nd Class, STS

Above it was a photo, and a set of fingerprints.

Clayton grinned. They'd never know it wasn't Parks getting on the ship.

Parks was a steward, too. A cook's helper. That was good. If he'd been a jetman or something like that, the crew might wonder why he wasn't on duty at takeoff. But a steward was different.

Clayton sat for several minutes, looking through the

booklet and drinking from the bottle. He emptied it just before the warning sirens keened through the thin air.

Clayton got up and went outside toward the ship.

"Wake up! Hey, you! Wake up!"

Somebody was slapping his cheeks. Clayton opened his eyes and looked at the blurred face over his own.

From a distance, another voice said: "Who is it?"

The blurred face said: "I don't know. He was asleep behind these cases. I think he's drunk."

Clayton wasn't drunk—he was sick. His head felt like hell. Where the devil was he?

"Get up, bud. Come on, get up!"

Clayton pulled himself up by holding to the man's arm. The effort made him dizzy and nauseated.

The other man said: "Take him down to sick bay, Casey. Get some thiamin into him."

Clayton didn't struggle as they led him down to the sick bay. He was trying to clear his head. Where was he? He must have been pretty drunk last night.

He remembered meeting Parks. And getting thrown out by the bartender. Then what?

Oh, yeah. He'd gone to the

Sharks for a bottle. From there on, it was mostly gone. He remembered a fight or something, but that was all that registered.

The medic in the sick bay fired two shots from a hypogun into both arms, but Clayton ignored the slight sting.

"Where am I?"

"Real original. Here, take these." He handed Clayton a couple of capsules, and gave him a glass of water to wash them down with.

When the water hit his stomach, there was an immediate reaction.

"Oh, Christ!" the medic said. "Get a mop, somebody. Here, bud; heave into this." He put a basin on the table in front of Clayton.

It took them the better part of an hour to get Clayton awake enough to realize what was going on and where he was. Even then, he was plenty groggy.

It was the First Officer of the STS-52 who finally got the story straight. As soon as Clayton was in condition, the medic and the quartermaster officer who had found him took him up to the First Officer's compartment.

"I was checking through the stores this morning when I found this man. He was

asleep, dead drunk, behind the crates."

"He was drunk, all right," supplied the medic. "I found this in his pocket." He flipped a booklet to the First Officer.

The First was a young man, not older than twenty-eight with tough-looking gray eyes. He looked over the booklet.

"Where did you get Parkinson's ID booklet? And his uniform?"

Clayton looked down at his clothes in wonder. "I don't know."

"You *don't know*? That's a hell of an answer."

"Well, I was drunk," Clayton said defensively. "A man doesn't know what he's doing when he's drunk." He frowned in concentration. He knew he'd have to think up some story.

"I kind of remember we made a bet. I bet him I could get on the ship. Sure—I remember, now. That's what happened; I bet him I could get on the ship and we traded clothes."

"Where is he now?"

"At my place, sleeping it off, I guess."

"Without his oxy-mask?"

"Oh, I gave him my oxidation pills for the mask."

The First shook his head. "That sounds like the kind of trick Parkinson would pull, all

right. I'll have to write it up and turn you both in to the authorities when we hit Earth." He eyed Clayton. "What's your name?"

"Cartwright. Sam Cartwright," Clayton said without batting an eye.

"Volunteer or convicted colonist?"

"Volunteer."

The First looked at him for a long moment, disbelief in his eyes.

It didn't matter. Volunteer or convict, there was no place Clayton could go. From the officer's viewpoint, he was as safely imprisoned in the spaceship as he would be on Mars or a prison on Earth.

The First wrote in the log book, and then said: "Well, we're one man short in the kitchen. You wanted to take Parkinson's place; brother, you've got it—without pay." He paused for a moment.

"You know, of course," he said judiciously, "that you'll be shipped back to Mars immediately. And you'll have to work out your passage both ways—it will be deducted from your pay."

Clayton nodded. "I know."

"I don't know what else will happen. If there's a conviction, you may lose your volunteer status on Mars. And

there may be fines taken out of your pay, too.

"Well, that's all, Cartwright. You can report to Kissman in the kitchen."

The First pressed a button on his desk and spoke into the intercom. "Who was on duty at the airlock when the crew came aboard last night? Send him up. I want to talk to him."

Then the quartermaster officer led Clayton out the door and took him to the kitchen.

The ship's driver tubes were pushing it along at a steady five hundred centimeters per second squared acceleration, pushing her steadily closer to Earth with a little more than half a gravity of drive.

There wasn't much for Clayton to do, really. He helped to select the foods that went into the automatics, and he cleaned them out after each meal was cooked. Once every day, he had to partially dismantles them for a really thorough going-over.

And all the time, he was thinking.

Parkinson must be dead; he knew that. That meant the Chamber. And even if he wasn't, they'd send Clayton back to Mars. Luckily, there was no way for either planet to communicate with the ship; it was

hard enough to keep a beam trained on a planet without trying to hit such a comparatively small thing as a ship.

But they would know about it on Earth by now. They would pick him up the instant the ship landed. And the best he could hope for was a return to Mars.

No, by God! He wouldn't go back to that frozen mud-ball! He'd stay on Earth, where it was warm and comfortable and a man could live where he was meant to live. Where there was plenty of air to breathe and plenty of water to drink. Where the beer tasted like beer and not like slop. Earth. Good green hills, the like of which exists nowhere else.

Slowly, over the days, he evolved a plan. He watched and waited and checked each little detail to make sure nothing would go wrong. It *couldn't* go wrong. He didn't want to die, and he didn't want to go back to Mars.

Nobody on the ship liked him; they couldn't appreciate his position. He hadn't done anything to them, but they just didn't like him. He didn't know why; he'd *tried* to get along with them. Well, if they didn't like him, the hell with them.

If things worked out the

way he figured, they'd be damned sorry.

He was very clever about the whole plan. When turn-over came, he pretended to get violently spacesick. That gave him an opportunity to steal a bottle of chloral hydrate from the medic's locker.

And, while he worked in the kitchen, he spent a great deal of time sharpening a big carving knife.

Once, during his off time, he managed to disable one of the ship's two lifeboats. He was saving the other for himself.

The ship was eight hours out from Earth and still decelerating when Clayton pulled his getaway.

It was surprisingly easy. He was supposed to be asleep when he sneaked down to the drive compartment with the knife. He pushed open the door, looked in, and grinned like an ape.

The Engineer and the two jetmen were out cold from the chloral hydrate in the coffee from the kitchen.

Moving rapidly, he went to the spares locker and began methodically to smash every replacement part for the drivers. Then he took three of the signal bombs from the emergency kit, set them for

five minutes, and placed them around the driver circuits.

He looked at the three sleeping men. What if they woke up before the bombs went off? He didn't want to kill them though. He wanted them to know what had happened and who had done it.

He grinned. There was a way. He simply had to drag them outside and jam the door lock. He took the key from the Engineer, inserted it, turned it, and snapped off the head, leaving the body of the key still in the lock. Nobody would unjam it in the next four minutes.

Then he began to run up the stairwell toward the good lifeboat.

He was panting and out of breath when he arrived, but no one had stopped him. No one had even seen him.

He clambered into the lifeboat, made everything ready, and waited.

The signal bombs were not heavy charges; their main purposes was to make a flare bright enough to be seen for thousands of miles in space. Fluorine and magnesium made plenty of light—and heat.

Quite suddenly, there was no gravity. He had felt nothing, but he knew that the bombs had exploded. He

punched the LAUNCH switch on the control board of the lifeboat, and the little ship leaped out from the side of the greater one.

Then he turned on the drive, set it at half a gee, and watched the STS-52 drop behind him. It was no longer decelerating, so it would miss Earth and drift on into space. On the other hand, the life-ship would come down very neatly within a few hundred miles of the spaceport in Utah, the destination of the STS-52.

Landing the lifeship would be the only difficult part of the maneuver, but they were designed to be handled by beginners. Full instructions were printed on the simplified control board.

Clayton studied them for awhile, then set the alarm to waken him in seven hours and dozed off to sleep.

He dreamed of Indiana. It was full of nice, green hills and leafy woods, and Parkinson was inviting him over to his mother's house for chicken and whiskey. And all for free.

Beneath the dream was the calm assurance that they would never catch him and send him back. When the STS-52 failed to show up, they would think he had been

lost with it. They would never look for him.

When the alarm rang, Earth was a mottled globe looming hugely beneath the ship. Clayton watched the dials on the board, and began to follow the instructions on the landing sheet.

He wasn't too good at it. The accelerometer climbed higher and higher, and he felt as though he could hardly move his hands to the proper switches.

He was less than fifteen feet off the ground when his hand slipped. The ship, out of control, shifted, spun, and toppled over on its side, smashing a great hole in the cabin.

Clayton shook his head and tried to stand up in the wreckage. He got to his hands and knees, dizzy but unhurt, and took a deep breath of the fresh air that was blowing in through the hole in the cabin.

It felt just like home.

Bureau of Criminal
Investigation
Regional Headquarters
Cheyenne, Wyoming
20 January 2102

To: Space Transport Service
Subject: Lifeship 2, STS-52
Attention Mr. P. D. Latimer
Dear Paul,

I have on hand the copies

of your reports on the rescue of the men on the disabled STS-52. It is fortunate that the Lunar radar stations could compute their orbit.

The detailed official report will follow, but briefly, this is what happened:

The lifeship landed—or, rather, crashed—several miles west of Cheyenne, as you know, but it was impossible to find the man who was piloting it until yesterday because of the weather.

He has been identified as Ronald Watkins Clayton, exiled to Mars fifteen years ago.

Evidently, he didn't realize that fifteen years of Martian gravity had so weakened his muscles that he could hardly walk under the pull of a full Earth gee.

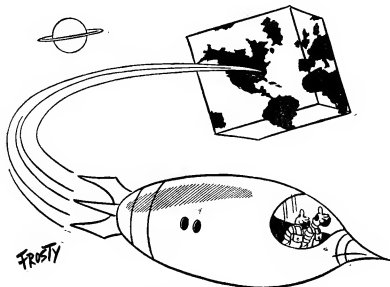
As it was, he could only crawl about a hundred yards from the wrecked lifeship before he collapsed.

Well, I hope this clears up everything.

I hope you're not getting the snow storms up there like we've been getting them.

John B. Remley
Captain, CBI

THE END



"Well—this certainly challenges the credibility of the Columbus theory!"



Pop's lightning brain reacted. He sent in the haymaker.

Frankie was ready for the big test—Ten-Time Winner of the world title. He was young and fit and able; also, he had Milt's cunning brain to direct every feint and punch. This left only one thing in doubt, the—

VITAL INGREDIENT

By GERALD VANCE

"CHAMP, what's with ya lately?" Benny asked the question as they lay on the beach.

"Nothing," Frankie answered. "Just fight-nite miseries, I guess."

"No it ain't, Frankie. It's something else. You losin' confidence in Milt? That it? Can't you hold it one more time? You guys only need tonite and you got it. One more to make Ten-Time Defenders — The first in the game, Frankie."

"We won the last two on points, Benny. Points—and I'm better than that. I keep waiting, and waiting, for my heels to set; for Milt to send it up my legs and back and let fly. But he won't do it, Benny."

"Look, Champ, Milt knows what he's doing. He's sending

you right. You think maybe you know as much as Milt?"

"Maybe I just do, Benny. Maybe I do."

Benny didn't have the answer to this heresy. By law this was Frankie's last fight—as a fighter. If he won this one and became a Ten-Time Defender he would have his pick of the youngsters at the Boxing College just as Milt had chosen him fifteen years before. For fifteen years he'd never thrown a punch of his own in a fight ring.

Maybe because it was his last fight in the ring he felt the way he did today. He understood, of course, why fighters were mentally controlled by proved veterans. By the time a fighter had any real experience and know-how in the old days, his body was

shot. Now the best bodies and the best brains were teamed by mental control.

Benny had an answer now. "Champ, I think it's a good thing this is your last fight. You know too much. After this one you'll have a good strong boy of your own and you can try some of this stuff you've been learning. Milt knows you're no kid anymore. That's why he has to be careful with you."

"I still have it, Benny. My speed, my punch, my timing—all good. There were a dozen times in those last two fights I could have crossed a right and gone home early."

"Two times, Frankie. Just two times. And then late in the fight. Milt didn't think you had it, and I don't think you did either."

Milt, Frankie's master control, came down to the beach and strolled over to join them. Milt had been a five time Defender in the Welter division before his fights ran out. Now he was skinny and sixty. His was the mind that had directed every punch Frankie had ever thrown.

He studied the figure of Frankie lying on the sand. The two-hundred-pound fighting machine was thirty years old. Milt winced when he

compared it to that of the twenty-two year old slugger they would have to meet in a few hours.

Benny said "Hi," and ambled off.

"Well, boy, this one means a lot to both of us," Milt said.

"Sure," was all Frankie could answer.

"For you, the first Ten-Time Defender the heavy-weight division has ever produced. For me, The Hall of Boxing Fame."

"You want that pretty bad, don't you, Milt?"

"Yeah, I guess I do, Frankie, but not bad enough to win it the wrong way."

Frankie's head jerked up. "What do you mean, the wrong way?"

Milt scowled and looked as though he wished he hadn't said that. He turned his head and stared hard at his fighter. "There's something we maybe ought to have talked about, Frankie."

"What's that?"

Milt struggled for words. "It's just—oh, hell! Forget it. Just forget I said anything."

"You figure we win tonight?"

"I think maybe we will."

"You don't seem very sure. On points, huh?"

"Yeah, maybe on points." Milt turned his eyes back on

Frankie's eager face. "Frankie, boy—there's something about being a Ten-Time Defender that's, well—different."

Milt took a deep breath and was evidently ready to tell Frankie exactly what he meant. But Frankie broke in, his voice low and tense. "Milt—"

"Yes?"

"When I get in there tonight—turn me loose!"

Milt was startled at the words. "Release *control*?"

"Yeah—sure. I think I can take Nappy Gordon on my own!"

"Nappy can stick his fist through a brick wall—all night long. And Pop Monroe knows all there is to know and some he makes up himself. They'd be a tough pair to beat. Our big ace is that they have to beat us. We *got* the Nine-Times."

"I can take him Milt!"

There was a strange light in Milt's eyes. He did not speak and Frankie went on. "Just one round, Milt! If I slip you can grab control again."

"You just want a try at it, huh?"

There seemed to be disappointment in Milt's voice; something Frankie couldn't understand. Milt seemed sud-

denly nervous, ill-at-ease. But Frankie was too eager to give it much attention. "How about it, Milt—huh?"

Milt had been squatting on the sand. He got to his feet and looked out across the water. "All right. Maybe we'll try it."

He seemed sad as he walked away. Frankie, occupied with his own elation, didn't notice...

In the studio dressing room, a few hours later Milt and Frankie were warming up. Frankie in the practice ring and Milt perched on a high chair just outside the ropes.

Everything was just as it would be in the fight. Three minutes work, one minute rest. Frankie noticed how slowly and carefully, Milt was working him, and how he watched the clock.

Frankie had nothing to do now but watch, as a spectator would; watch as Milt moved him around, Milt could control every muscle, every move and every reflex of his body. It had taken them five years to perfect this routine. That was the training period at the College of Boxing, and was prescribed by law.

In their first fight they had been at their peak. Frankie

was Milt's second boy and Milt knew boxing as only a Champion Welter with thirty years of experience could know it. For fifteen years he had watched and studied while a good veteran had directed his body. And for another fifteen years he had been the guiding brain to a fine Middleweight.

As a Welterweight, Milt had learned to depend on speed and quick hands. In Frankie he had found the dream of every Welter—a punch. Frankie's body could really deliver the power. At first it had been the heavy hitting that had won the fights lately. Milt had relied more and more on the speed and deception he had developed in Frankie.

Frankie felt the control ease out and knew the warm-up was over. He slipped on his robe and he and Milt went to join the others in the TV studio.

There would be no crowd. Just the cameras, the crews and officials. The fight would be televised in 3-D and filmed in slow motion. If a decision were needed to determine the winner it would be given only after a careful study had been made of the films.

There was little to be done

in the studio and Milt had timed Frankie's warm-up right to the minute. The fighters and their controllers took their positions. The controllers seated in high chairs on opposite sides of the ring. The fighters in opposite corners.

As the warning buzzer sounded, Frankie felt Milt take control. This one he would watch closely.

At the bell Frankie rose and moved out slowly. He noticed how relaxed, almost limp Milt was keeping him. There was only a little more effort used than in the pre-fight warm-up. His left hand had extra speed but only enough power to command respect. The pattern was just about as he had expected. As the fight went along the left would add up the points. But his thoughts were centered on a single question. *How is it going to be on my own?*

In the early rounds he was amazed at the extreme caution Milt was employing. Nappy Gordon's face was beginning to redden from the continual massage of Frankie's brisk left and occasional right. But Frankie felt that his own face must be getting flushed with eagerness. The glory of going in and trying to do it by himself; of beating Pop Monroe without

Milt's help. He wondered if Milt would have to clamp on the controls again. He sure hoped not. But there wasn't anything to really worry about. Milt could beat Pop Monroe and he wouldn't let Frankie take a beating by himself.

Frankie's attention was caught by some odd thoughts in Milt's mind. Milt didn't seem to be sending them, yet they were clear and direct: *You really think you've got it, boy? That vital ingredient?*

What you talking about?

Huh? Me? Oh, nothing. Take it easy. But Milt's thoughts were troubled.

When you going to let me go?

I said, take it easy. We'll see.

The sixth round came and Frankie felt no weariness. Milt was working him like he was made of fragile glass. Nor was Nappy tiring so far as he could notice. Pop Monroe was trying for just one solid blow to slow down the Champ. So far nothing even jarring had come close to landing.

In the seventh Frankie noticed a little desperation in Monroe's tactics. To win now Monroe and Gordon needed a knockout. Frankie had only to

stay on his feet to be home safe. But when was Milt going to let him go? Milt had turned in a masterpiece of defensive fighting. The left had deadly accuracy and now the openings were truck-sized as Monroe had come to ignore the light tattoo of the Champ's punches.

Milt withdrew the control in the middle of the seventh round. It hit Frankie like a dash of cold water, the exultation of being on his own! He looked over at Milt, perched rope-high in his control chair at ringside. Milt was looking at him, his face tight and grim; almost hostile.

Frankie circled warily, a touch of panic coming unbidden. What to do? He hadn't known it would be quite like this. He tried to remember how it was—how it felt to move in the various ways Milt always sent him. Funny how you could forget such things. The left hook—that jab—how did they go?

A pile driver came from somewhere and almost tore his head off his shoulders . . .

He was looking up at the ceiling. He rolled his eyes and saw Pop Monroe's face—smiling a little, but also puzzled. Even with his brain groggy, Frankie knew why. He'd stepped wide open in

Nappy's looping right and Pop couldn't figure Milt doing a thing like that.

Pop looked over at Milt. Frankie followed Pop's eyes and saw the look Milt returned. Then the spark of understanding that passed between them. Odd, Frankie thought. What understanding could there be?

He was aware of the word seven filling the studio as the loud speaker blared the count. He was up at nine.

Nappy swarmed in now. Frankie felt the pain of hard solid blows on his body as he tried to tie up this dynamo Poppy Monroe was releasing on him. He couldn't stop it, dodge it, or hide from it.

But he finally got away from it—staggering. Nappy came at him fast and the left jab Frankie sent out to put him off balance didn't even slow the fury a bit. Frankie took to the ropes to make Nappy shorten his punches. It helped some, but not enough. No man could take the jolting effect of those ripping punches and keep his feet under him. Frankie didn't—he was down when the bell ended round nine.

In his corner the seconds worked quickly. He looked at Milt and saw a dead-pan ex-

pression. Milt wasn't sending him anything. Punishing him of course. Frankie took it meekly; ashamed of himself. Milt would take over again when the bell sounded. Frankie knew that he couldn't stay away from Nappy for another round. Nobody could. Monroe smelled a knockout and Frankie was never fast enough to run away from the burst of viciousness that would come at him in the form of Nappy Gordon. No. Milt would take over.

At the bell, Frankie moved out fast, waiting for the familiar feel of Milt expertly manipulating his arms and legs and body; sending out the jabs and punches; weaving him in and out.

But Milt didn't take over and Pop sent Nappy in with a pile-driver right that smashed Frankie to the floor. Frankie rolled over on his knees and shook his head groggily, trying to understand. Why hadn't Milt taken over? What was Milt trying to do to him?

Milt's cold face waved into focus before Frankie's blinking eyes. *What was Milt trying to do?* Frankie heard the tolling count—six, seven, eight. Milt wasn't even going to help him up. Sick and bewildered, Frankie struggled

to his feet. Nappy came driving in. Frankie back-pedalled and took the vicious right cross while rolling away. Thus he avoided being knocked out and was only floored for another eight-count.

Milt — Milt — for God's sake—

The round was over. Frankie staggered, sick, to his corner and slumped down. The handlers worked over him. He looked at Milt. But Milt neither sent nor returned his gaze. Milt sat looking grimly off into space and seemed older and wearier than time itself.

Then Frankie knew. Milt had sold him out!

The shocking truth stunned him even more than Nappy's punches. Milt had sold him out! There had been rare cases of such things. When money meant more than honor to a veteran. But Milt!

Numbed, Frankie pondered the ghastly thought. After all, Milt was old. Old men needed money for their later years. But how could he? How could he do it?

Suddenly Frankie hated. He hated Nappy and Pop and every one of the millions of people looking silently on around the world. But most of all, he hated Milt. It was a weird, sickening thing, that

hatred. But only a mentally sickening thing. Physically, it seemed to make Frankie stronger, because when the bell rang and he got up and walked into a straight right, it didn't hurt at all.

He realized he was on the floor; the gong was sounding; he was getting up, moving in again. There was blood, a ringing in his head.

But above all, a rage to kill. To kill.

He remembered going down several times and getting up. Not caring how he had swung under Milt's control—only wanting to use his fists—to kill the thing weaving in front of him.

Nappy. A grinning, weaving, lethal ghost.

He felt a pain in his right fist and saw Nappy go down. He saw Pop's face go gray as though the old man himself had felt the force of the blow. Saw Nappy climb erect slowly. He grinned through blood. Frankie—ghost-catcher. He had to get him.

He was happy; happy with a new fierceness he had never before known. The lust of battle was strong within him and when Pop weaved Nappy desperately, Frankie laughed, waited, measured Nappy.

And smashed him down

with a single jarring right.

The bell tolled ten. Pop got wearily off his stool and walked away. Frankie strode grimly to his corner, ignored Milt, moved on into the dressing room.

He knew Milt would come and he waited for him, sitting there coldly on the edge of the table. Milt walked in the door and stood quietly.

"You sold me out," Frankie said.

There was open pride in Milt's eyes. "Sure—you had to think that."

"What do you mean, think? You didn't pick me up when Pop flattened me. I saw the look between you and Pop."

"Sure." Milt's eyes were still proud. "You had to know. That's how I wanted it."

"Milt—why did you do it?"

"I didn't do it. I just had to make you think I did."

"In God's name—why?"

"Because I'm sentimental, maybe, but I've always had my own ideas about the kind of fighter who should be a Ten-Time winner. All my life I've kept remembering the old greats — Dempsey, Sullivan, Corbett—the men who did it on their own, and I wanted you to get it right—on your own—like a real champion."

Frankie was confused. "I wanted to go on my own. Why

didn't you tell me then?"

"Then you'd have lost. You'd have gone down whimpering and moaning. You see, Frankie, all those old fighters had a vital ingredient—the thing it takes to make a champion—courage."

"And you didn't think I had it?"

"Sure I did. But the killer instinct is dead in fighters today and it has to be ignited. It needs a trigger, so that was what I gave you—a trigger."

Frankie understood, "You wanted me to get mad!"

"To do it, you had to get mad—at me. You're not conditioned to get mad at Nappy or Pop. It's not the way we fight now. It had to be me. I had to make you hate me."

Frankie marveled. "So when Pop looked at you—"

"He knew."

Frankie was off the table, his arms around Milt. "I'm—I'm so ashamed."

Milt grinned. "No, you're not. You're happier than you ever were in your life. You're a real champion. Great feeling, isn't it? Now you know how *they* felt—in the old days."

Frankie was crying. "You are damn right! Thanks."

Milt looked years younger. "Don't mention it—*champ*."

THE END

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THE HUNTED HEROES

By ROBERT SILVERBERG

LET'S keep moving," I told Val. "The surest way to die out here on Mars is to give up." I reached over and turned up the pressure on her oxy mask to make things a little easier for her. Through the glassite of the mask, I could see her face contorted in an agony of fatigue.

And she probably thought the failure of the sandcat was all my fault, too. Val's usually about the best wife a guy could ask for, but when she wants to be she can be a real flying bother.

It was beyond her to see that some greasemonkey back at the Dome was at fault— whoever it was who had failed to fasten down the engine hood. Nothing but what had stopped us *could* stop a sandcat: sand in the delicate

*The planet itself was tough enough — barren, desolate, forbidding; enough to stop the most adventurous and dedicated. But they had to run head-on against a mad genius who had a motto:
Death to all Terrans!*

mechanism of the atomic engine.

But no; she blamed it all on me somehow: So we were out walking on the spongy sand of the Martian desert. We'd been walking a good eight hours.

"Can't we turn back now, Ron?" Val pleaded. "Maybe there isn't any uranium in this sector at all. I think we're crazy to keep on searching out here!"

I started to tell her that the UranCo chief had assured me we'd hit something out this way, but changed my mind. When Val's tired and overwrought there's no sense in arguing with her.

I stared ahead at the bleak, desolate wastes of the Martian landscape. Behind us somewhere was the comfort



He was a cripple in a wheelchair—helpless as a rattlesnake.

of the Dome, ahead nothing but the mazes and gullies of this dead world.

"Try to keep going, Val." My gloved hand reached out and clumsily enfolded hers. "Come on, kid. Remember—we're doing this for Earth. We're heroes."

She glared at me. "Heroes, hell!" she muttered. "That's the way it looked back home, but, out there it doesn't seem so glorious. And UranCo's pay is stinking."

"We didn't come out here for the pay, Val."

"I know, I know, but just the same—"

It must have been hell for her. We had wandered fruitlessly over the red sands all day, both of us listening for the clicks of the counter. And the geigers had been obstinately hushed all day, except for their constant undercurrent of meaningless noises.

Even though the Martian gravity was only a fraction of Earth's, I was starting to tire, and I knew it must have been really rough on Val with her lovely but unrugged legs.

"Heroes," she said bitterly. "We're not heroes—we're suckers! Why did I ever let you volunteer for the Geig Corps and drag me along?"

Which wasn't anywhere close to the truth. Now I

knew she was at the breaking point, because Val didn't lie unless she was so exhausted she didn't know what she was doing. She had been just as much inflamed by the idea of coming to Mars to help in the search for uranium as I was. We knew the pay was poor, but we had felt it a sort of obligation, something we could do as individuals to keep the industries of radio-actives-starved Earth going. And we'd always had a roving foot, both of us.

No, we had decided together to come to Mars—the way we decided together on everything. Now she was turning against me.

I tried to jolly her. "Buck up, kid," I said. I didn't dare turn up her oxy pressure any higher, but it was obvious she couldn't keep going. She was almost sleep-walking now.

We pressed on over the barren terrain. The geiger kept up a fairly steady click-pattern, but never broke into that sudden explosive tumult that meant we had found pay-dirt. I started to feel tired myself, terribly tired. I longed to lie down on the soft, spongy Martian sand and bury myself.

I looked at Val. She was dragging along with her eyes

half-shut. I felt almost guilty for having dragged her out to Mars, until I recalled that I hadn't. In fact, she had come up with the idea before I did. I wished there was some way of turning the weary, bedraggled girl at my side back into the Val who had so enthusiastically suggested we join the Geigs.

Twelve steps later, I decided this was about as far as we could go.

I stopped, slipped out of the geiger harness, and lowered myself ponderously to the ground. "What'samatter, Ron?" Val asked sleepily. "Something wrong?"

"No, baby," I said, putting out a hand and taking hers. "I think we ought to rest a little before we go any further. It's been a long, hard day."

It didn't take much to persuade her. She slid down beside me, curled up, and in a moment she was fast asleep, sprawled out on the sands.

Poor kid, I thought. Maybe we shouldn't have come to Mars after all. But, I reminded myself, *someone* had to do the job.

A second thought appeared, but I squelched it:

Why the hell me?

I looked down at Valerie's sleeping form, and thought of

our warm, comfortable little home on Earth. It wasn't much, but people in love don't need very fancy surroundings.

I watched her, sleeping peacefully, a wayward lock of her soft blonde hair trailing down over one eyebrow, and it seemed hard to believe that we'd exchanged Earth and all it held for us for the raw, untamed struggle that was Mars. But I knew I'd do it again, if I had the chance. It's because we wanted to keep what we had. Heroes? Hell, no. We just liked our comforts, and wanted to keep them. Which took a little work.

Time to get moving. But then Val stirred and rolled over in her sleep, and I didn't have the heart to wake her. I sat there, holding her, staring out over the desert, watching the wind whip the sand up into weird shapes.

The Geig Corps preferred married couples, working in teams. That's what had finally decided it for us—we were a good team. We had no ties on Earth that couldn't be broken without much difficulty. So we volunteered.

And here we are. Heroes. The wind blasted a mass of sand into my face, and I felt it tinkle against the oxymask.

I glanced at the suit-chronometer. Getting late. I decided once again to wake Val. But she was tired. And I was tired too, tired from our wearying journey across the empty desert.

I started to shake Val. But I never finished. It would be so nice just to lean back and nuzzle up to her, down in the sand. So nice. I yawned, and stretched back.

I awoke with a sudden startled shiver, and realized angrily I had let myself doze off. "Come on, Val," I said savagely, and started to rise to my feet.

I couldn't.

I looked down. I was neatly bound in thin, tough, plastic tangle-cord, swathed from chin to boot-bottoms, my arms imprisoned, my feet caught. And tangle-cord is about as easy to get out of as a spider's web is for a trapped fly.

It wasn't Martians that had done it. There weren't any Martians, hadn't been for a million years. It was some Earthman who had bound us.

I rolled my eyes toward Val, and saw that she was similarly trussed in the sticky stuff. The tanglecord was still fresh, giving off a faint, repugnant odor like that of dry-

ing fish. It had been spun on us only a short time ago, I realized.

"Ron—"

"Don't try to move, baby. This stuff can break your neck if you twist it wrong." She continued for a moment to struggle futilely, and I had to snap, "Lie still, Val!"

"A very wise statement," said a brittle, harsh voice from above me. I looked up and saw a helmeted figure above us. He wasn't wearing the customary skin-tight pliable oxysuits we had. He wore an outmoded, bulky spacesuit and a fishbowl helmet, all but the face area opaque. The oxygen cannisters weren't attached to his back as expected, though. They were strapped to the back of the wheelchair in which he sat.

Through the fishbowl I could see hard little eyes, a yellowed, parchment-like face, a grim-set jaw. I didn't recognize him, and this struck me odd. I thought I knew everyone on sparsely-settled Mars. Somehow I'd missed him.

What shocked me most was that he had no legs. The spacesuit ended neatly at the thighs.

He was holding in his left hand the tanglegun with which he had entrapped us,

and a very efficient-looking blaster was in his right.

"I didn't want to disturb your sleep," he said coldly. "So I've been waiting here for you to wake up."

I could just see it. He might have been sitting there for hours, complacently waiting to see how we'd wake up. That was when I realized he must be totally insane. I could feel my stomach-muscles tighten, my throat constrict painfully.

Then anger ripped through me, washing away the terror. "What's going on?" I demanded, staring at the half of a man who confronted us from the wheelchair. "Who are you?"

"You'll find out soon enough," he said. "Suppose now you come with me." He reached for the tanglegun, flipped the little switch on its side to MELT, and shot a stream of watery fluid over our legs, keeping the blaster trained on us all the while. Our legs were free.

"You may get up now," he said. "Slowly, without trying to make trouble." Val and I helped each other to our feet as best we could, considering our arms were still tightly bound against the sides of our oxysuits.

"Walk," the stranger said,

waving the tanglegun to indicate the direction. "I'll be right behind you." He holstered the tanglegun.

I glimpsed the bulk of an outboard atomic rigging behind him, strapped to the back of the wheelchair. He fingered a knob on the arm of the chair and the two exhaust ducts behind the wheel-housings flamed for a moment, and the chair began to roll.

Obediently, we started walking. You don't argue with a blaster, even if the man pointing it is in a wheelchair.

"What's going on, Ron?" Val asked in a low voice as we walked. Behind us the wheelchair hissed steadily.

"I don't quite know, Val. I've never seen this guy before, and I thought I knew everyone at the Dome."

"Quiet up there!" our captor called, and we stopped talking. We trudged along together, with him following behind; I could hear the *crunch-crunch* of the wheelchair as its wheels chewed into the sand. I wondered where we were going, and why. I wondered why we had ever left Earth.

The answer to that came to me quick enough: we had to. Earth needed radioactives,

and the only way to get them was to get out and look. The great atomic wars of the late 20th Century had used up much of the supply, but the amount used to blow up half the great cities of the world hardly compared with the amount we needed to put them back together again.

In three centuries the shattered world had been completely rebuilt. The wreckage of New York and Shanghai and London and all the other ruined cities had been hidden by a shining new world of gleaming towers and flying roadways. We had profited by our grandparents' mistakes. They had used their atomics to make bombs. We used ours for fuel.

It was an atomic world. Everything: power drills, printing presses, typewriters, can openers, ocean liners, powered by the inexhaustible energy of the dividing atom.

But though the energy is inexhaustible, the supply of nuclei isn't. After three centuries of heavy consumption, the supply failed. The mighty machine that was Earth's industry had started to slow down.

And that started the chain of events that led Val and me to end up as a madman's prisoners, on Mars. With every

source of uranium mined dry on Earth, we had tried other possibilities. All sorts of schemes came forth. Project Sea-Dredge was trying to get uranium from the oceans. In forty or fifty years, they'd get some results, we hoped. But there wasn't forty or fifty years' worth of raw stuff to tide us over until then. In a decade or so, our power would be just about gone. I could picture the sort of dog-eat-dog world we'd revert back to. Millions of starving, freezing humans tooth-and-clawing in it in the useless shell of a great atomic civilization.

So, Mars. There's not much uranium on Mars, and it's not easy to find or any cinch to mine. But what little is there, helps. It's a stopgap effort, just to keep things moving until Project Sea-Dredge starts functioning.

Enter the Geig Corps: volunteers out on the face of Mars, combing for its uranium deposits.

And here we are, I thought.

After we walked on a while, a Dome became visible up ahead. It slid up over the crest of a hill, set back between two hummocks on the desert. Just out of the way enough to escape observation.

For a puzzled moment I

thought it was our Dome, the settlement where all of Uran-Co's Geig Corps were located, but another look told me that this was actually quite near us and fairly small. A one-man Dome, of all things!

"Welcome to my home," he said. "The name is Gregory Ledman." He herded us off to one side of the airlock, uttered a few words keyed to his voice, and motioned us inside when the door slid up. When we were inside he reached up, clumsily holding the blaster, and unscrewed the ancient spacesuit fishbowl.

His face was a bitter, dried-up mask. He was a man who hated.

The place was spartanly furnished. No chairs, no tape-player, no decoration of any sort. Hard bulkhead walls, rivet-studded, glared back at us. He had an automatic chef, a bed, and a writing-desk, and no other furniture.

Suddenly he drew the tangle-gun and sprayed our legs again. We toppled heavily to the floor. I looked up angrily.

"I imagine you want to know the whole story," he said. "The others did, too."

Valerie looked at me anxiously. Her pretty face was a dead white behind her oxy-mask. "What others?"

"I never bothered to find out their names," Ledman said casually. "They were other Geigs I caught un-awares, like you, out on the desert. That's the only sport I have left—geig-hunting. Look out there."

He gestured through the translucent skin of the Dome, and I felt sick. There was a little heap of bones lying there, looking oddly bright against the redness of the sands. They were the dried, parched skeletons of Earth-men. Bits of cloth and plastic, once oxymasks and suits, still clung to them.

Suddenly I remembered. There had been a pattern there all the time. We didn't much talk about it; we chalked it off as occupational hazards. There had been a pattern of disappearances on the desert. I could think of six, eight names now. None of them had been particularly close friends. You don't get time to make close friends out here. But we'd vowed it wouldn't happen to us.

It had.

"You've been hunting Geigs?" I asked. "Why? What've they ever done to you?"

He smiled, as calmly as if I'd just praised his house-keeping. "Because I hate

you," he said blandly. "I intend to wipe every last one of you out, one by one."

I stared at him. I'd never seen a man like this before; I thought all his kind had died at the time of the atomic wars.

I heard Val sob, "He's a madman!"

"No," Ledman said evenly. "I'm quite sane, believe me. But I'm determined to drive the Geigs—and UranCo—off Mars. Eventually I'll scare you all away."

"Just pick us off in the desert?"

"Exactly," replied Ledman. "And I have no fears of an armed attack. This place is well fortified. I've devoted years to building it. And I'm back against those hills. They couldn't pry me out." He let his pale hand run up into his gnarled hair. "I've devoted years to this. Ever since—ever since I landed here on Mars."

"What are you going to do with us?" Val finally asked, after a long silence.

He didn't smile this time. "Kill you," he told her. "Not your husband. I want him as an envoy, to go back and tell the others to clear off." He rocked back and forth in his wheelchair, toying with the

gleaming, deadly blaster in his hand.

We stared in horror. It was a nightmare—sitting there, placidly rocking back and forth, a nightmare.

I found myself fervently wishing I was back out there on the infinitely safer desert.

"Do I shock you?" he asked. "I shouldn't—not when you see my motives."

"We don't see them," I snapped.

"Well, let me show you. You're on Mars hunting uranium, right? To mine and ship the radioactives back to Earth to keep the atomic engines going. Right?"

I nodded over at our geiger counters.

"We volunteered to come to Mars," Val said irrelevantly.

"Ah—two young heroes," Ledman said acidly. "How sad. I could almost feel sorry for you. Almost."

"Just what is it you're after?" I said, stalling, stalling.

"Atomics cost me my legs," he said. "You remember the Sadlerville Blast?" he asked.

"Of course." And I did, too. I'd never forget it. No one would. How could I forget that great accident—killing hundreds, injuring thousands more, sterilizing forty miles of Mississippi land—when

the Sadlerville pile went up?"

"I was there on business at the time," Ledman said. "I represented Ledman Atomics. I was there to sign a new contract for my company. You know who I am, now?"

I nodded.

"I was fairly well shielded when it happened. I never got the contract, but I got a good dose of radiation instead. Not enough to kill me," he said. "Just enough to necessitate the removal of—" he indicated the empty space at his thighs. "So I got off lightly." He gestured at the wheelchair blanket.

I still didn't understand. "But why kill us Geigs? *We* had nothing to do with it."

"You're just in this by accident," he said. "You see, after the explosion and the amputation, my fellow-members on the board of Ledman Atomics decided that a semi-basket case like myself was a poor risk as Head of the Board, and they took my company away. All quite legal, I assure you. They left me almost a pauper!" Then he snapped the punchline at me.

"They renamed Ledman Atomics. Who did you say you worked for?"

I began, "Uran—"

"Don't bother. A more inventive title than Ledman

Atomics, but not quite as much heart, wouldn't you say?" He grinned. "I saved for years; then I came to Mars, lost myself, built this Dome, and swore to get even. There's not a great deal of uranium on this planet, but enough to keep me in a style to which, unfortunately, I'm no longer accustomed."

He consulted his wrist watch. "Time for my injection." He pulled out the tangle-gun and sprayed us again, just to make doubly certain. "That's another little souvenir of Sadlerville. I'm short on red blood corpuscles."

He rolled over to a wall table and fumbled in a container among a pile of hypodermics. "There are other injections, too. Adrenalin, insulin. Others. The Blast turned me into a walking pin-cushion. But I'll pay it all back," he said. He plunged the needle into his arm.

My eyes widened. It was too nightmarish to be real. I wasn't seriously worried about his threat to wipe out the entire Geig Corps, since it was unlikely that one man in a wheelchair could pick us all off. No, it wasn't the threat that disturbed me, so much as the whole concept, so strange to me, that the hu-

man mind could be as warped and twisted as Ledman's.

I saw the horror on Val's face, and I knew she felt the same way I did.

"Do you really think you can succeed?" I taunted him. "Really think you can kill every Earthman on Mars? Of all the insane, cockeyed—"

Val's quick, worried headshake cut me off. But Ledman had felt my words, all right.

"Yes! I'll get even with every one of you for taking away my legs! If we hadn't meddled with the atom in the first place, I'd be as tall and powerful as you, today—instead of a useless cripple in a wheelchair."

"You're sick, Gregory Ledman," Val said quietly. "You've conceived an impossible scheme of revenge and now you're taking it out on innocent people who've done nothing, nothing at all to you. That's not sane!"

His eyes blazed. "Who are you to talk of sanity?"

Uneasily I caught Val's glance from a corner of my eye. Sweat was rolling down her smooth forehead faster than the auto-wiper could swab it away.

"Why don't you do something? What are you waiting for, Ron?"

"Easy, baby," I said. I knew what our ace in the hole was. But I had to get Ledman within reach of me first.

"Enough," he said. "I'm going to turn you loose outside, right after—"

"Get sick!" I hissed to Val, low. She began immediately to cough violently, emitting harsh, choking sobs. "Can't breathe!" She began to yell, writhing in her bonds.

That did it. Ledman hadn't much humanity left in him, but there was a little. He lowered the blaster a bit and wheeled one-hand over to see what was wrong with Val. She continued to retch and moan most horribly. It almost convinced me. I saw Val's pale, frightened face turn to me.

He approached and peered down at her. He opened his mouth to say something, and at that moment I snapped my leg up hard, tearing the tangle-cord with a snicking rasp, and kicked his wheelchair over.

The blaster went off, burning a hole through the Dome roof. The automatic sealers glued-in instantly. Ledman went sprawling helplessly out into the middle of the floor, the wheelchair upended next to him, its wheels slowly revolving in the air. The blaster

flew from his hands at the impact of landing and spun out near me. In one quick motion I rolled over and covered it with my body.

Ledman clawed his way to me with tremendous effort and tried wildly to pry the blaster out from under me, but without success. I twisted a bit, reached out with my free leg, and booted him across the floor. He fetched up against the wall of the Dome and lay there.

Val rolled over to me.

"Now if I could get free of this stuff," I said, "I could get him covered before he comes to. But how?"

"Teamwork," Val said. She swivelled around on the floor until her head was near my boot. "Push my oxymask off with your foot, if you can."

I searched for the clamp and tried to flip it. No luck, with my heavy, clumsy boot. I tried again, and this time it snapped open. I got the tip of my boot in and pried upward. The oxymask came off, slowly, scraping a jagged red scratch up the side of Val's neck as it came.

"There," she breathed. "That's that."

I looked uneasily at Ledman. He was groaning and beginning to stir.

Val rolled on the floor and her face lay near my right arm. I saw what she had in mind. She began to nibble the vile-tasting tangle-cord, running her teeth up and down it until it started to give. She continued unflinchingly.

Finally one strand snapped. Then another. At last I had enough use of my hand to reach out and grasp the blaster. Then I pulled myself across the floor to Ledman, removed the tangle-gun, and melted the remaining tangle-cord off.

My muscles were stiff and bunched, and rising made me wince. I turned and freed Val. Then I turned and faced Ledman.

"I suppose you'll kill me now," he said.

"No. That's the difference between sane people and insane," I told him. "I'm not going to kill you at all. I'm going to see to it that you're sent back to Earth."

"No!" he shouted. "No! Anything but back there. I don't want to face them again—not after what they did to me—"

"Not so loud," I broke in. "They'll help you on Earth. They'll take all the hatred and sickness out of you, and turn you into a useful member of society again."

"I hate Earthmen," he spat out. "I hate all of them."

"I know," I said sarcastically. "You're just all full of hate. You hated us so much that you couldn't bear to hang around on Earth for as much as a year after the Sadlerville Blast. You had to take right off for Mars without a moment's delay, didn't you? You hated Earth so much you *had* to leave."

"Why are you telling all this to me?"

"Because if you'd stayed long enough, you'd have used some of your pension money to buy yourself a pair of prosthetic legs, and then you wouldn't need this wheelchair."

Ledman scowled, and then his face went belligerent again. "They told me I was paralyzed below the waist. That I'd never walk again, even with prosthetic legs, because I had no muscles to fit them to."

"You left Earth too quickly," Val said.

"It was the only way," he protested. "I had to get off—"

"She's right," I told him. "The atom can take away, but it can give as well. Soon after you left they developed *atomic-powered* prosthetics—amazing things, virtually robot legs. All the survivors of

the Sadlerville Blast were given the necessary replacement limbs free of charge. All except you. You were so sick you had to get away from the world you despised and come here."

"You're lying," he said. "It's not true!"

"Oh, but it is," Val smiled.

I saw him wilt visibly, and for a moment I almost felt sorry for him, a pathetic legless figure propped up against the wall of the Dome at blaster-point. But then I remembered he'd killed twelve Geigs—or more—and would have added Val to the number had he had the chance.

"You're a very sick man, Ledman," I said. "All this time you could have been happy, useful on Earth, instead of being holed up here nursing your hatred. You might have been useful, on Earth. But you decided to channel everything out as revenge."

"I still don't believe it—those legs. I might have walked again. No—no, it's all a lie. They told me I'd never walk," he said, weakly but stubbornly still.

I could see his whole structure of hate starting to topple, and I decided to give it the final push.

"Haven't you wondered how I managed to break the tangle-cord when I kicked you over?"

"Yes—human legs aren't strong enough to break tangle-cord that way."

"Of course not," I said. I gave Val the blaster and slipped out of my oxysuit. "Look," I said. I pointed to my smooth, gleaming metal legs. The almost soundless purr of their motors was the only noise in the room. "I was in the Sadlerville Blast, too," I said. "But I didn't go crazy with hate when I lost *my* legs."

Ledman was sobbing.

"Okay, Ledman," I said. Val got him into his suit, and brought him the fishbowl helmet. "Get your helmet on and let's go. Between the psychs and the prosthetics men, you'll be a new man inside of a year."

"But I'm a murderer!"

"That's right. And you'll be sentenced to psych adjustment. When they're finished, Gregory Ledman the killer will be as dead as if they'd electrocuted you, but there'll be a new—and sane—Gregory Ledman." I turned to Val.

"Got the geigers, honey?"

For the first time since Ledman had caught us, I remembered how tired Val had

been out on the desert. I realized now that I had been driving her mercilessly—me, with my chromium legs and atomic-powered muscles. No wonder she was ready to fold! And I'd been too dense to see how unfair I had been.

She lifted the geiger harnesses, and I put Ledman back in his wheel chair.

Val slipped her oxymask back on and fastened it shut.

"Let's get back to the Dome in a hurry," I said. "We'll turn Ledman over to the authorities. Then we can catch the next ship for Earth."

"Go back? *Go back?* If you think I'm backing down now and quitting you can find yourself another wife! After we dump this guy I'm sacking in for twenty hours, and then we're going back out there to finish that search-pattern. Earth needs uranium, honey, and I know you'd never be happy quitting in the middle like that." She smiled. "I can't wait to get out there and start listening for those tell-tale clicks."

I gave a joyful whoop and swung her around. When I put her down, she squeezed my hand, hard.

"Let's get moving, fellow hero," she said.

I pressed the stud for the airlock, smiling.

THE END

LEASE TO DOOMSDAY

By LEE ARCHER

IT WAS the lack of sense in the ad that made him go back to it again. He was having his breakfast coffee in the cafeteria next to the midtown hotel where he lived. The classified section of the New York *Times* was spread before him.

WANTED: Live wire
Real Estate broker—No
selling—30-40, Room 657
Sivers Building—9 - 12
Monday morning.

The ad made no sense for several reasons. One: you just don't go around advertising for brokers with four pages of them in the classified phone book. Two: how can one be a live wire broker, without having to sell? Kevin Muldoon shook his head. Just no damn sense. The Sivers Building—

The twins were a rare team indeed. They wanted to build a printing plant on a garbage dump. When Muldoon asked them why, their answer was entirely logical:

"Because we live here."

H'm! Not too far off. He looked at his strap watch. Fifteen minutes of nine. He could walk it in that time.

"Don't be a fool," he said to himself. "It's obviously a come-on of some kind."

He got up, paid the check and went out. It wasn't till he was on Third Ave. that he was conscious he had started to go crosstown when his office was in the opposite direction. He smiled wryly. Might as well investigate, he thought. Can't do any harm, and it won't take long.

There were four others waiting in the small ante-room. The outer door bore no legend other than the room number, and the inner door was blank altogether. Muldoon made a quick appraisal of those waiting. Three were



The weird machine clicked and clattered while the twins dreamed of tomorrow.

obviously past middle-age, the fourth about Muldoon's age. The inner door opened and Muldoon looked up. A tall man came out first, a man in his early sixties, perhaps. Immediately behind him came a slightly shorter man, but very heavy and with a head that was bald as a billiard ball. The older man marched straight to the door, opened it and went out without a second look back. The fat man looked around, his face beaming in a wide smile, eyes almost closed behind fleshy lids.

"And now, who's next?" he asked.

The one who was about Muldoon's age stepped forward. The fat man motioned for the other to precede him. The door closed. Not more than a minute went by, and the door opened again and the same act as before with the older man was gone through.

"And now, who's next?" the fat man asked.

Muldoon noted even the inflection was the same.

So it went with the three who were left, until it was Muldoon's turn. And now there were six others beside himself also waiting to be interviewed.

It was a squarish room, simply furnished, with a couple of desks set side-by-

side with a narrow space between them. A chair was set up facing the desks, obviously meant for the one to be interviewed. Seated behind one of the desks was the twin of the man now coming to seat himself at the other desk. Their smiles were identical as they waited for Muldoon to make himself comfortable.

For a moment there was a blank silence. Muldoon studied them, and they, smiling still, studied him. Muldoon broke the silence.

"You know," Muldoon said, "your ad didn't make sense to me."

The twins hunched forward slightly at their desks. Their eyes brightened in anticipation. "No-o? . . ." said the one who had been waiting for Muldoon. "Why?"

"With some four pages of brokers in the classified directory, you don't have to advertise for one. And a live-wire broker gets that reputation as a salesman. Without selling, the wire is dead."

The twins beamed at each other.

"Evin," said the one to the left, "I think we've found our man. Will you go out and tell those waiting?"

They waited for the twin to return.

"I am Robert Reeger, my

brother Evin," said the first twin.

Muldoon introduced himself. There was no handshaking.

"You are right about the ad," Robert Reeger said. "We worded it that way for a reason. We wanted a man of quick intelligence. Mind you, now, we do want a broker, and one who will do no selling. The 'live wire' part was my brother Evin's thought. He does sometimes have clever ideas."

Robert stopped to beam at his twin. "Just now," Robert returned to Muldoon, "I won't go into full discussion of our plans. Briefly, however, we are buyers, buyers, we hope, of a particular area. Because of what we have in mind to do we would rather it was done quietly and without any publicity. Had we engaged the services of a large agency this would not be possible, for, if I may coin a phrase, the trumpet must blow strongly to announce the coming of genius." He smiled, stroked his chin, looked up at the ceiling and his lips moved silently as if he enjoyed repeating the phrase.

"I like that, Robert," Evin said.

"Yes, I thought it was good," Robert said.

They both looked to Muldoon.

Muldoon said nothing.

The twins sighed audibly, in unison.

Robert's lips came forward in a pout. The look of a pouting cherub, Muldoon thought, one trying to look stern, and only succeeding in looking naughty-childish. Muldoon suddenly knew of whom the twins reminded him. Twin Charles Laughtons, without hair.

"You *are* free to work for us?" Robert asked.

"With you," Muldoon said. "I have the license." He gave them a quick smile, as if to lessen the sharpness of the tone he had used. "A broker acts for a client in the purchase or sale of property. He can't be employed by them."

"Of course," Robert said quickly. "I did not mean to imply any other action. Now suppose you tell us briefly about yourself."

Muldoon gave them a thumbnail sketch of his career. He noted their pleased look that he was a one-man agency. At the conclusion, Robert stood up and came around the desk. He thrust a hand at Muldoon.

Like shaking hands with a piece of warm dough, Muldoon thought.

"I do believe," Robert said as he placed a heavy arm around Muldoon's shoulder, and walked him to the door, "that we shall have a mutually happy relationship. You will not be unrewarded, money-wise." He opened the door, paused, still with his arm around Muldoon, and looked steadily into Muldoon's eyes. "Yes, I think there will be mutual benefits in our relationship. Now, in conclusion, will you pick us up at this office tomorrow morning at nine?"

Muldoon nodded.

"Good! Then 'bye now, Mr. Muldoon, and thanks so much for coming by in answer to our ad."

The answer to an irritating thought came to Muldoon while he was waiting for an elevator to take him to the ground floor. He knew where he had seen the same kind of look as was in Robert Reeger's eyes when they had parted. In the eyes of a cat Muldoon had once seen toying with a mouse the cat had caught . . .

Deena Savory was a redhead, a green-eyed redhead with a kind of patrician look about her face that came off very well in the photographs they took of her. Deena was a model, and made three times

the money Kevin Muldoon made.

It had always been a sore point between them, and more than once the reason for their worst quarrels.

She was also the worst cook in New York.

Monday evenings were spent in Deena's small apartment on East Fifty-Sixth Street, and she usually cooked dinner for Muldoon. Invariably it was steak. Deena had no imagination when it came to food. Even in restaurants she ordered one or another kind of steak.

They were together on the couch, she stretched full-length, her head in Muldoon's lap. He was telling her about the Reeger twins and what had happened that morning. His hands caressed her lightly as she spoke, now across her cheeks, now more intimately.

". . . I don't dig them, Honey," he said, as if in recapitulation. "The Robert twin, f'r instance. 'You will not be unrewarded, money-wise.' Madison Avenue and Nineteenth Century English . . ."

She gently took his hand from where he seemed to find most comfort, and put it up to her cheek. "What's the difference?" she asked. "So long as there's money in it?"

"Broker's commission," he said. "No more or less."

"You've been getting so much of that, lately?"

"N-no."

"Okay, then. Stop fighting it. What do you care what kind of English they use? Or whether they used sign language. The buck, kid, the buck."

"Deena," Muldoon said gravely, "you have the grubbing soul of a pawnbroker. Or real estate broker," he added. He bent his head and kissed her lips.

Her lips opened to his with that familiar warmth, a hunger for him which never failed to thrill. This time she did not remove his hand when it returned.

". . . Kevie, baby—darling . . . oh, my darling," she whispered.

Strange, he thought, that at a moment like this, I should be thinking of those fat twins . . .

Muldoon hated the pirate prices of midtown parking lots, and so was late. It had taken him ten minutes to find parking space for the Plymouth. As he started to open the door of room 657 he heard the voice of one of the twins. The words or sounds were in a language completely foreign to him. He thought to knock,

but changed his mind. To knock would have made it obvious he had been listening. He barged right in.

The twins were in the ante-room. Muldoon got the impression they knew he had heard them, and an even stronger impression, that the fact was of no importance. That bothered him, for some reason.

"Ah, there you are," the twin to the left said. "Evin was wondering whether you would show up, but I told him he was putting himself to useless aggravation."

That damned mixed-up phrasing again, Muldoon thought. "Took a little time to find parking space," he said.

"Shall we be off, then?" Robert asked.

"All right with me," Muldoon replied. There was another odd thing. Evin Reeger seemed to have so very little to say.

Their destination was a place halfway down the Island. Muldoon's brow had lifted when they gave him the area. So far as he knew there hadn't been any development in the area. It was just a bit too far off the highways and rail lines for housing developments, and even more badly located for industrial requirements. He wondered what the

devil they had in mind out there.

Traffic was light and the drive took little more than an hour and a half on the main highway, and another fifteen minutes of blacktop side road before Evin told him to "Turn left here," onto a rutted path off the blacktop. The path led through some scrub growth that ended on the edge of an acre or so of dump heap. Rust-ed heaps of broken cars were scattered about. A foul odor came from the left as though garbage, too, had been dumped and left to rot. There was a flat one-storied wooden shack close by to which Evin directed him to drive up to.

Evin produced a key and opened the door to the shack. There was a partition separating the place neatly into two sections. There were a couple of straight-backed wooden chairs and a leather sofa in the near room. The door to the other room was closed.

"Sit down, Muldoon," Robert Reeger said. He waited for Muldoon to make himself comfortable on the sofa, then continued: "First time we've ever been out here during the day. But Evin's sense of direction is unfailing." He shook his head, smiled brightly. "Ah, well, we must each have some

factor to make for validity of existence, eh?"

"I don't follow," Muldoon said.

"No matter. Now, to the business at hand. I wanted you to see the area involved. Evin, the plot plan, please."

To Muldoon's surprise Evin Reeger went into the next room and returned after a moment with a plot plan of the lower third of the Island. He gave it to Muldoon who spread it at his feet.

"That red-pencilled area I've marked off," Robert Reeger said, "is what we'll be concerned with. As you notice, the dump and this shack are at the approximate center. What I have in mind to do is buy all the land in the marked-off area."

"Buy it! . . ."

"You seem surprised."

"Shocked, would be the better word. Have you any idea what this could cost? You've marked off an area of approximately a square mile. Even out here that would run into millions. And once news got around that someone was buying parcels of this size—well, you'd have more publicity than you might want."

"About the cost we won't worry. There will be enough money. But the attendant publicity could mean not being

able to get the land we want. Is that correct?"

"Could be. Suppose we get options, or leases on these pieces . . ."

"That was a good phrase," Evin broke in unexpectedly. "Don't you think so, Robert?"

"Yes!" Robert said sharply. He seemed to have suddenly lost his smile. He gave Evin a hard look from under down-drawn brows. He turned to Muldoon. "We are renting this, this tumbledown structure. A two year lease. H'mm! I see your point. Spending millions in a sudden buying move would make unneeded difficulties. No! Options to buy, but lease for the present. Evin, the list of names, please."

Evin didn't have to go anywhere for the list. He had it with him. Muldoon looked it over. There were thirty-three names, including the County and State.

"Well?" Robert said.

"I'll have to know what you want to lease it for, the name or names of corporations, and so forth."

"Will my own name do?"

"It will. But you can go into the County Court and register a business name under your own, what they call a D. B. A. name—doing business as—name. Register as many as

you wish. Doesn't cost a great deal. Or form a corporation, you and your brother."

"No. Let the leases come under my own name. As for what I intend doing, well, I intend to concrete surface the entire area."

"A square mile of concrete? . . ."

"Yes. There is a government plan to use this end of the Island for a huge missile depot. They will have to come to me."

Pretty shrewd, Muldoon thought. That is if it's true. "All right," Muldoon said. "When do you want me to start?"

"Right now. That was one reason for bringing you out here. Evin, will you get the brief case, please?"

Once more Evin Reeger went into the other room. And closed the door carefully behind him when he came out. He handed the brief case to Muldoon.

"You may open it," Robert said.

Muldoon's fingers became suddenly nerveless, and he dropped the brief case. It was crammed with money, packets of hundred-dollar bills.

"There are fifty packets of hundred-dollar bills, totalling a million dollars," Robert said.

"What the hell did you want me to do, carry the case around with me?" Muldoon asked.

"No. It will remain here. I merely wanted to show you I will be able to stand behind any price you may have to meet. From now on report here, no matter what time. And, since time has a definite value in this matter, do not stand upon it."

"I like that," Evin said, suddenly. "That was good, Robert."

Muldoon nodded. Evin had a value, too. The same value any yes-man has. But it bothered Muldoon. This just wasn't the way of twins. At least none he knew. Well, one thing was certain; the Reegers had the ready cash . . .

"This may take some time," Muldoon said. "Weeks, certainly, maybe months. The County and State, alone . . ."

"We don't have that much time," Roger broke in. "Evin must return in ten days . . ."

"Return? Where?" Muldoon asked.

It was as if Roger hadn't heard. "The State and County properties are small areas, and on the very edge. Suppose we forget about them for the time being. Work on the private parties."

"Anything you say. But it may still take weeks."

"Then don't quibble. Lease at any price. If a show of cash is necessary, let me know. Now I think you'd better start. Good luck, Muldoon."

It was Wednesday night before Muldoon saw Deena Savory again. Nor had he seen the Reeger twins since leaving them Monday morning. Deena and Muldoon seldom saw each other during the middle of the week; they were her busy days and she needed the nights for complete rest. But he had called her and asked to see her. They were at dinner in a small Italian place close to her apartment.

He had briefly brought her up to date on what had happened since she had seen him last, and was at the moment finishing the last of the lasagna he had ordered.

"They're phonies, honey, real phonies," he said. "I'll bet my last buck on that."

She was looking at the last piece of steak on her plate. With an almost defiant gesture she speared it and put it in her mouth.

"Atta girl," he said.

"Mind your own business," she said. "How do you mean they're phonies?"

"I spent all Monday investigating *them*!"

"A fine way to make a dollar," she said. "What do you care who they are?"

He gave her a knowing smile. "That's my fat-headed girl. Like to visit me in a nice jail, wouldn't you? One with a prestige address, of course. Let me tell you. They rented that shack, and the dump heap next to it for a pretty fancy figure. Robert Reeger said they were going to do printing in that shack. They paid in full for the two years rental, in nice crisp hundred-dollar bills . . ."

"I get it! They were phony," she exulted.

"How can you be so stupid? I know. For you it's easy. Of course the bills were genuine. But the printing business—what were they going to print with, typewriters? Another thing. There's no business record I could find on them; they're not listed. So how did they get a million dollars, and Robert said more. Report here, no matter what the time." I don't get it. I drove them out. There was no garage, no car I could see, and the place is miles from food. How do they live out there?"

"Maybe they have friends who pick them up," Deena said.

"Maybe. Robert also said there was a rumor or some-

thing about the government going to use the area for a missile depot. I tried to run it down. Nothing."

"Which proves nothing," she said.

"True. But I couldn't even smell smoke. No, the whole thing just smells bad. So I think I'm going back there and tell them to forget it."

"Oh, don't be an idiot," she said. "This is your big chance to make some real money, get a reputation, and because you're chicken, you're going to throw it up."

"I won't get into anything crooked!" his voice rose.

"The way you're thinking you couldn't follow a straight line."

"They can't draw a straight line."

"Well, you do what you want. Only, the next time I have to pay for a dinner don't give me that martyred look."

"Okay. Okay. What do you want for dessert, spumoni?"

"After this, bicarbonate."

"Very funny."

And for the first time in several years she did not kiss him good night, when they parted.

He turned off the blacktop and started down the rutted path. He switched the headlights off about halfway to the

shack, and parked it a hundred or so yards away from it and walked the rest. The shack was dark.

Instead of knocking, Muldoon walked around to the back and peered through the single window at the rear. He could see nothing. Now isn't this just dandy, he thought. Drive all the way out here, and nobody's at home. Damn! He went around to the front and started back to the car. His attention was caught by a greenish glow of light from the far end of the dump heap.

His curiosity aroused, Muldoon warily made his way through the metal litter until he was close enough to make out the source of the light. It came from the center of a shallow area that had been cleared of rubble. A rusted misshapen mass of metal lay in the center of the cleared space. The greenish glow was coming from an opening in the mass.

Muldoon crept closer until he was able to make out details. Not too many but enough to give him an idea of the size and general shape of the thing. But what really held him were the figures of Robert and Evin Reeger.

He saw them quite distinctly.

One of the twins was bent

over a machine of some sort. There were levers, gears, and rollers mounted on a webbed platform no larger than a rather oversized typewriter. Muldoon's eyes went wide at the sight of the greenbacks coming in a steady stream from the interior of the machine and falling into a box at the side. He could see very little else that was in the room, other than the brother of the twin at the machine. He was on the far side of it, fiddling with something hidden.

Muldoon stared in fascination for another minute, then carefully made his way back to the car. He had parked it within the growth of scrub trees and bushes. He started it, turned the headlights on, and drove slowly out into the open and up to the shack. He honked his horn loudly a couple of times and got out of the car and walked up to the shack and tried the door. It was closed.

Presently the figures of Evin and Robert Reeger came into view from the direction of the dump heap. Muldoon's figure was outlined in the glow of the headlights. Muldoon noticed the brief case one of them was carrying.

"Ah, there, Muldoon," Muldoon had recognized Robert's voice.

"Hello, Mr. Reeger. Thought I'd come by and let you know how I've been doing."

Evin, who was carrying the brief case, unlocked the door and switched on the light. The other two followed him into the room. Robert Reeger motioned for Muldoon to take the sofa. Evin went into the other room.

"Well, my boy," Robert said heartily. "How is it going?"

"Slowly," Muldoon said casually. "But the first of this sort of operation has to go that way. Kind of feel things out, if you know what I mean?"

"Of course. How does it look?"

"I think it's going to go all right. I've got plans."

"Splendid! Do you need money?"

"Yes. About ten thousand."

"Evin! Do bring the case out," Robert called loudly.

In a couple of seconds, Evin Reeger appeared. He brought the brief case to his brother, turned, and went back into the other room without saying anything. He walked slowly and stiffly, his feet slapping heavily on the bare boards.

"What's wrong with him?" Muldoon asked.

Robert Reeger was pulling money from the brief case. He

looked up with an expressionless face. "Nothing. You said ten thousand? . . ."

"Yes."

Reeger passed two of the packets to Muldoon. "Sure you won't need more?"

Muldoon put the money away, got up from the sofa, and started to the door. "No. Just what I need. Uh, I'll see you Friday night."

"Fine! And don't forget. We must get all this done quickly."

"I won't forget."

Robert Reeger waited till the sound of the Plymouth was no longer heard. Then he went into the other room. Other than for two army cots the room was empty. Evin was stretched full-length on one of the cots.

"You're certain he knows?" Evin asked.

"Yes. I saw him on the visio."

"But he couldn't see all the interior?"

"No. Just the duplicating machine. We must get rid of it tonight."

"What do you think he will do?"

"What can he do? He knows nothing. The money is genuine, and with the destruction of the machine he can't prove a n y t h i n g. Nevertheless it

might be the wisest course to get rid of him. We might have been too clever with that advertisement."

"Possibly. But we must move quickly, then. I must leave this planet in seven days now. And we must have this area under lease by then. Three musts!"

Robert smiled thinly. "We will. If not through Muldoon, then through another means. When you return in a year with the space fleet you will find the landing area we need."

"And after that . . ."

They smiled at each other.

"We said we would not fail. This planet will fall to our weapons like ripe fruit from a tree."

"But first I must return to tell them," Evin said. "If I do not return they will know we have failed, and will seek another planet."

"We won't fail," Robert reiterated. "Right now, let's get back to the space ship and the duplicating machine."

Muldoon spent a busy Thursday. A newsbrief in the *Times* financial section which told of a public utility wanting Island property gave him an idea for one thing. He spent all morning bringing the idea to a head, after he had verified

the truth of the item. Then, after a late lunch, he went to the Treasury Department's headquarters and spent a couple of hours with the head of the local investigation department.

He was quite pleased with himself by nightfall, as he headed out to the Island. This time he parked the car at a considerable distance from the shack. There were lights on, this night. He walked boldly up and knocked at the door. It opened wide and the thick figure of one of the twins darkened the opening.

"Well, Mr. Muldoon. I did not think to see you till Friday."

"I thought I'd come and see you tonight," Muldoon said as he stepped into the room.

"I didn't hear the car."

"Oh. Parked it back a bit," Muldoon said. He turned toward the other twin as the inner door opened. "Hello."

"Hello."

"You know, Evin," Robert said, "I'm rather glad Muldoon stopped by tonight. We might as well conclude our business with him now."

"An excellent idea, Robert. Excellent."

"What do you mean?" Muldoon asked. "I no longer am acting for you?"

"Not for us, for yourself."

I'm afraid your services, in any capacity, will no longer be needed."

Muldoon caught the undercurrent of menace in Robert's voice. It told him they were not only suspicious but ready to act on it. He started to edge toward the door, but Robert suddenly reached out and took his arm. There was power in the fat man's grip. Evin moved swiftly for his size, and took up a position before the door, which he kicked shut.

Muldoon twisted sharply and was free of the other's grip. He stepped back a couple of paces. "What the hell's this all about?"

"Come now, Muldoon," Robert said softly. "You didn't think your prying went unobserved, last night?"

"So I was nosey. But what's this rough stuff you're trying to pull?"

"Merely making sure your curiosity will end tonight."

Muldoon took a couple of more retreating paces. "You mean you're going to get rid of me? Well, maybe you will, and maybe you won't. But even if you do . . ."

A smile broke through the grim lips of the twin threatening Muldoon. "You mean the duplicating machine? Just an-

other piece of rusted scrap among the rest of the junk."

Muldoon paled. The evidence he was going to need, gone.

"And of course the money is genuine. We made sure of it. Ink, paper, everything. We made sure of it long ago. It will be a pity you won't be here to see how efficient we can really be. But the rest of the planet will know. As soon as Evin returns."

Muldoon's mind was working swiftly. "You got rid of the machine. But what about the junk shop it was in. I'll bet there are more important things there."

"Indeed there are. But no one will find it. It will be just another rusted piece of large junk to them."

It was then Muldoon made his move. He lashed out with a fist. The blow staggered Robert. And Muldoon was crashing his shoulder against the inner door. It burst inward, but before he could get through Robert grabbed him. The whole side of Muldoon's face went numb as Robert crashed his fist against his jaw. Muldoon knew he didn't stand a chance in a straight-up fight, not with these two. Robert's hands were reaching for him, now.

Muldoon grabbed one of the

hands with both of his, twisted outward as he grasped two fingers in each hand. Robert's face went putty-grey as the bones snapped. Muldoon no longer cared about fair play. His knee came up where it could do most damage, and Robert sank grovelling to the floor.

Muldoon whirled. Too late. The world exploded in a thousand flashes of pain-filled lights. He went crashing backward into the wall. Evin hit him again before he stumbled blindly away from the terrible fist.

"Let me kill him," Robert groaned.

Muldoon pulled himself up from the pain-filled world he had been sent into. There seemed to be two Evins facing him. Then there was only one. A twisted grin came to Muldoon's lips. "Come ahead, you rat," he mumbled.

Evin came forward. And swift as an adder Muldoon kicked him just below the knee cap. Evin screamed, and collapsed. Muldoon staggered out of the way of the falling body, only to fall into the clutches of Robert's sudden reaching fingers.

He fell to the floor.

Robert tried to get his good hand up to Muldoon's throat. Muldoon beat at the thick

face with both hands. But the other seemed not to feel the pounding fists. Slowly the fingers managed to reach their goal. Muldoon felt the darkness of death closing over him as his breath became a tortured dying gasp. His hand found Robert's face, came gently over it until his thumb pressed on one eyeball. And Robert screamed as the thumb became a hooked instrument to blind him.

Muldoon rolled away from the other, staggered somehow erect, but knew his strength was gone. He couldn't make it to the door. And now Evin had him . . .

And the door burst open and men poured into the room. Muldoon recognized only one, the head of the Treasury's investigation department, before he blacked out.

Deena Savory stroked his forehead gently. "Does it hurt much, baby?"

The nurse had left them alone when Deena came into the hospital room.

"Not now," Muldoon said.

"What are they going to do to those men?" she asked.

"Oh, twenty years, according to Phillips. Counterfeiting, you know, carries heavy penalties."

"But I thought the money

was good? After all, they had paid rent with C-notes."

"A slip-up on the bank's part. You see they made one mistake. The machine they had, turned out perfect bills. Every one with the same serial number . . ."

Denna's eyes widened.

"And the junk shop or whatever it was?" she said.

"I thought I'd let well enough alone. You see I took care of that during the day. The twins, being criminals, had automatically broken their lease. They also made it possible for me to change clients. Well, there's going to be

a huge tank covering that dump and shack, a tank holding an awful lot of natural gas. I got together with the owner of the property and the utility people yesterday afternoon and worked out a deal. They're going to dump all that junk into the ocean."

"I'm sorry about the other night," she said suddenly.

"Is that how you say you're sorry?" he asked.

"Uh-uh," she said, as he reached for her. "There's a time and place for that."

"Promise."

Her lips agreed.

THE END

FLIGHT TO DEATH IN A JUNGLE!



For many, aviation is an exciting hobby. But to five American missionaries, flying was the means of bringing civilization to primitive Indian tribes. The missionaries were brutally slain in an Ecuador jungle recently. September **FLYING** tells of their heroic exploits and their tragic deaths. Be sure to read it!

**BUY YOUR COPY OF SEPTEMBER FLYING TODAY
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THE BRIGHT PHOENIX. *By Harold Mead. 153 pp. Ballantine Books. Cloth: \$2.00; Paper: 35¢*

Here is a brilliant, disturbing, beautifully-written book of the caliber of such works as "Brave New World," and "1984"; like the novels cited, it is a story of sociological science fiction, full of perceptive insights, artistry, skill, and a deep but bitter faith in humanity, and, like the others, was written by a Briton.

Briefly, the story is this: in the post-atomic war era, the race of Man has once again reached civilization, one whose religion pledges that violence will never again be used by Man. But violence is still being used—against heretics and non-conformists: made mindless by an advanced psychological science, they are the "Reconditioneds," the hewers of wood and carriers of water. In a word, they are the slaves of the super-state.

John Waterville, the narrator, is an explorer who has brought back news of vast new lands to colonize. The Colonists, eugenically bred into a heroic mold, have been made ready. But once the colony is settled, John finds to his distress and horror that the Colonists intend to wipe out the region's original settlers—and John must decide whether he must watch violence once again threaten mankind, or play traitor against his own kind.

There are other sub-plots: John's love for a girl who becomes Reconditioned; his relationships with the State and his fellow men—all of which give the book disturbing overtones

which, like the overtones of a violin, add a three-dimensionality to the narrative line.

For the devotee of pure and simple violence, there's plenty here too—and adventure enlivened by pungent characterization. I liked "The Bright Phoenix." I think you will, too.

NERVES. *By Lester Del Rey. 153 pp. Ballantine Books. Cloth: \$2.00; Paper: 35¢*

Back in 1942, Mr. Del Rey wrote a powerful novelette which he also called "Nerves." This volume is an amplification of that story.

In the near future, National Atomic's plant at Kimberly suffers a devastating accident just as a congressional committee makes its investigation of the plant. Reason for the latter: the growing fear by the populace, whipped up by a venal publisher's newspapers, that atomic power plants and reactors may eventually wipe out the race, or at least its progenitive powers.

In this maelstrom, five people struggle, not only for their own survival, but for the survival of at least half the United States, and perhaps the entire planet. Three are medical personnel: "Doc" Ferrel, once a world-famous surgeon and now head of atomic medicine at the plant; his new assistant, Dr. Jenkins, and Dr. Jenkins' wife, a doctor-nurse. Two are atom-jacks, the workers of the industry: Palmer, the head of the plant, and Jorgenson, the giant, raging boss-engineer.

Their struggle to save themselves and their men, and to keep the dreaded radioactive Isotope R from blowing up in a fission which might split the planet makes "Nerves" a novel of unbearable tension, well warranted to get on your own nerves, but in the most pleasant way imaginable.

LUCKY STARR AND THE BIG SUN OF MERCURY. *By Paul French, 191 pp. Doubleday & Co. \$2.50*

Although aimed at the teen-age trade, Mr. French's latest novel is well worth your reading. That's not surprising since Mr. French is really Dr. Isaac Asimov, of "Foundation" and "I, Robot" fame.

"Lucky" Starr, youngest member of Earth's Council of Science, investigates the sabotage of Project Light, a scientific experiment on the planet Mercury which may prove to be of incalculable benefit for all humanity. With his pal, John Big-

man Jones, Starr undergoes a series of adventures, all of which attest to the author's ingenuity. But whether fighting a mad robot on the burning surface of the planet, or hunted by tentacles of living rock deep within Mercury's interior, the hero acquits himself with the intelligence, the courage, and the acumen which we have come to expect of him. This makes the fourth in the "Lucky" Starr series—and not the last, I should judge, by a long shot.

INTERPLANETARY HUNTER. *By Arthur K. Barnes. 231 pp. Gnome Press. \$3.00*

Dating back to magazine stories of the '40s, some of these tales detailing the adventures of pretty Gerry Carlyle and bold, brave (and ingenious) Tommy Strike, collectors for the London Interplanetary Zoo, show their age. But you'll find yourself getting interested in the strange flora and fauna of Venus, Jupiter, Neptune, Saturn, and Almussen's Comet—and between watching the intrepid pair capture or slaughter the BEMs, and then squabble among themselves, there's plenty of action for any deep-dyed thud-and-blunder fan.

SPACE POLICE. *Edited by Andre Norton. 255 pp. World Publishing. \$2.75*

What a woman is Alice Mary Norton! As Andrew North, she writes science fiction adventure tales; as Andre Norton, she writes and edits other such tales; in her own person, she is s-f editor for Gnome Press, a former librarian, and the author of at least three books I've counted so far this year.

In "Space Police," she has included nine stories warranted to please the later 'teens, as well as any s-f fan who is young in heart. Contents are divided into three categories: "We Police Ourselves"; "We Are Policed"; and "Galactic Agents." Among the authors represented are Kendall Foster Crossen, James Blish, H. Beam Piper, L. Ron Hubbard, Jack Vance, and others whose names, while not as familiar as those cited, are yet a guarantee of excitement, adventure, and suspense.



...OR SO YOU SAY



BY THE READERS

Dear Editor:

This is my first letter to you and I'm mainly writing this in answer to Miss Lethalu Ray's letter in your magazine.

Yes, Miss Ray, I've been wondering too—do women still read s-f? Well, maybe they will wake up and write to this great magazine. Long live *Amazing*!

Well, I must run and greedily gloat over the all too few pages of *Fantastic*.

Mary Miller
422 Timberwilde
Houston, Texas

• *It's no secret. If by some inconceivable accident, we lost (bless 'em) our female readers, this grand old (bless it) magazine, would become non-existent in very short order.—ED.*

Dear Mr. Browne:

Congratulations on the July issue of *Amazing*. This was about the best of your digest-size issues that I've seen up to now.

About Ron Haydock's letter: I quite agreed with everything he said, especially about the change in pages and print on a page. Also I prefer the pulp size.

It's about time that you faced up to the fact that you're slipping, mainly in quality of stories, although "This Planet is Mine" was highly above average.

As for the editorial—"corny" is hardly the word for it.

"Stay Out of My Grave" was very well-written and quite enjoyable.

Stanley's "Last Chord" was interesting, but I did not like it as well as I did "The Monument" or "Catch a Thief."

"Run of Luck" was nothing more than a very old comic book plot, reset in outer space.

The cover illustration was, by far, the best in the book, although many of the others were fair too.

Lethalu Ray and Alan Cheuse also have darned good letters and made several interesting points.

If any reader has back issues of *Amazing* that they wish to sell I particularly want the following periods: 1944-48; 1939-42; 1933-37; and 1926-31. I would appreciate it if they would write to me telling the volume, number and date, as well as what they would consider a reasonable price.

After August 16th my address will be: Box 8687, Lantana, Florida.

Philip Chase
14 Kennebec Street
Bar Harbor, Maine

• *We're delighted that you liked the July issue, Mr. Chase. And we're sure you found the August book even better. Also that this September issue you're now reading is the finest of all. That is, up to the present moment. But just wait until you see October, November, and December. You really ain't seen nothin' yet!*—ED.

Dear Mr. Browne:

The July issue of *Amazing Stories* was better than ever. Every story was a jewel. Even my space adventure appetite was satisfied by "The Monument" and "The Last Chord." Of course I enjoyed our fabulous Johnny Mayhem adventure, "This Planet is Mine."

"The Observatory" section was a riot. H. Browne writing Westerns—oh, no! It's all in a joking manner or you shall be cast off into deep space to repent your sins.

W. C. Brandt
Apt. N
1725 Seminary Ave.
Oakland 21, Calif.

• A letter from Howard states he's busy and happy. He's working on a TV script (plug) for Warner Bros. called *Shock Wave*. Watch for it in your local living room.—ED.

Dear Editor:

Thoroughly enjoyed the July issue even though previous ones have been better. Stories were all very good to fair—nothing bad, nothing exceptional. C. H. Thames was right on top with his new "Johnny Mayhem" adventure, "This Planet Is Mine." Thames is gradually improving with his characterizations in these stories. His characters are mostly stiff and unreal.

There is sort of a tie for second place between "Run of Luck" and "The Last Chord." No stop—"Run of Luck" was second best. Twist ending stories like that always seem to fascinate me.

Illos in this issue were the best I have seen in any digest sized *Amazing*. Burlockoff had the best illo for "Run of Luck." But as I glance over the illos I notice that there aren't any Virgil Finlay ones. I don't understand why he has stopped. An illo once every three issues is not enough. So c'mon all you Finlay fans, let's give a yell for Virg.

I find that I agree with with Ron Haydock almost 100%. First, I think *Amazing Stories* should go pulp size. I simply don't understand why the heck you can't do it. Look, Ray Palmer has done it.

I also agree with Ron that *Fantastic* should start printing fantasy and horror stories again. There is a definite need for a magazine like that. I like science-fiction, but I also like fantasy. I am sure most readers agree.

Martin A. Fleischman
1247 Grant Avenue
Bronx 56, N.Y.

• *Finlay hasn't stopped working for us. We have quite a few of his illos on hand. You'll be seeing them as the months go by. Personally, we think Virgil and Bill Llewellyn are the best in the business.*—ED.

Dear Editor:

My first reaction to the cover of the July issue of *Amazing*

was the same as the fellow pictured in the foreground—up-thrown hands and a bewildered look. However, after reading the magazine and looking at it a few more times, it began to grow on me. The lead story was good, but didn't quite reach my expectations for the first Johnny Mayhem novelette. Really enjoyed "Stay Out of My Grave" and "The Last Chord" and give them top honors this issue. Interior illos this issue were very good, in spite of the absence of Finlay and Lawrence. Barth's illo was very appealing to me, and caused me to read that story first; and I wasn't disappointed at all with Burke's yarn.

Hope that you'll be able to pick up another good serial soon. Very few science fiction novels are adaptable to this format, I know, but there are some being written and appearing elsewhere. The greatest loss to the science fiction magazine with the switch to the digest format was the loss of the novel-length story; and the only alternative left to us today is the serial form. The shorter stories that are appearing today are way above those of the same type that appeared years ago, but then they also are fewer in number, and a higher quality average is able to be maintained.

See by *Fantasy-Times* that Howard Browne has left the editorial chair for other endeavors, but he's left the magazines in very capable hands. And, perhaps we can expect another Tharn novel from Howard Browne, now that he's free and away. Still have the first two in the original '42-43 and 1948 *Amazing* and think it's high time to add a third serial to the group. To anyone who has not read the first two Tharn novels, they are back in print and can be obtained for the low cost of \$3.00 (see ad in July *Amazing*) and are an excellent value in both entertainment and cost.

Herbert E. Beach
210 West Paquin
Waterville, Minn.

• *We're reading serials for future issues of AMAZING—you'd be surprised at how many bad ones are written—and have found a couple that have us really excited. All of us. And when you can excite the staff of this magazine (old pros every one) you've really got something. Serials present editorial problems in a monthly magazine. For instance, a lot of readers*

don't like a serial that runs too long. If it extends over too many months. Others don't mind. We are going to run our next one in two installments. We feel the idea might be very popular.—ED.

Dear Editor:

There have been many times during the past 11 years that I have been reading s-f when I have been tempted to write to any of the readers' columns. This is my first attempt and it has been inspired because of a statement you made in the July issue of *Amazing*: "It warms our heart when someone writes in praising our illustrations . . ."

I agree perfectly—a good story needs good illustrations. But, and this has plagued me for these 11 years, why do illustrators refuse to illustrate stories as the stories indicate; to wit: your story on page 96, "Catch A Thief" shows the hero and heroine garbed in space suits, being offered a canteen affair by a native with hands, yet the story definitely points out both male and female to be clothed in shorts and the native has tentacles instead of hands.

The point is why not illustrate the stories as the story itself calls for? This one thing has perturbed me for years and has been my one big gripe concerning s-f stories.

By the way, I do feel your other illustrations in this issue have been excellent and do follow the story. Especially the one connected with "Stay Out of My Grave." Oh, yes, let me put in my vote for "The Scarlet Saint." I thoroughly enjoyed it.

I felt I must agree with the criticisms of *Double Star* and *The City and the Stars* as put forth in "Spectroscope." Having read both stories, I can appreciate the comments made.

I commiserate with Ron Haydock of Illinois. I'm sorry to see so many of the s-f magazines leave the pulp form. I am, however, very happy to notice that it is not *Amazing* that is bringing the Shaver mysteries back into print. I feel that *Amazing* lost much of its prestige by even printing the junk years ago. The Shaver mysteries tie hand-in-hand with Adamski and his flying saucers—a lot of hogwash.

I appreciate s-f as a form of literature, but my appreciation stops when it is foisted on many immature minds as fact. I refer here to young teen-agers, recognizing that they have not had too many experiences to be very good judges and accept-

ing all too readily the printed word as pure fact. I can speak with some authority in this matter because I work with teenagers.

Mr. Merle Lamson
1657 Washington Blvd.
Ogden, Utah

• *Can we be sure that the flying saucer thing is built solely from the stuff of imagination? We wonder. We don't necessarily go along with the outer space theory and certainly not with those who claim the Russians built and launched the saucers. Still, the fact remains that over a long period of time nothing has been disproved—or proved, for that matter.—ED.*

Dear Editor:

Recently, in visiting my old homestead in Kansas, I ran across some remnants of my science fiction collection which were missed when I disposed of the bulk of it in 1938.

In case some of your readers might need them to complete a collection I would be most happy to dispose of them, either singly, or as a package.

Vol. I, No. 1, *Science Fiction Digest*, Sept. 1932.

Vol. I, No. 7, *International Observer*, 1937.

Vol. I, No. 1, (Advance issue) *Unusual Stories*, March 1934.

Vol. I, No. 1, *Brooklyn Reporter*, Feb. 25, 1935.

Vol. II, No. 2, *Amateur Correspondent*, Sept.-Oct. 1937.

Vol. I, No. 2, *Science Fiction Critic*, Dec. 1935.

Vol. IV, No. 1, *The Phantagraph*, July-Aug. 1935.

Vol. I, No. 1, *Science Fiction Bibliography*, 1935 (two copies)

Vol. I, No. 2, *Journal of the British Interplanetary Society*, May 1935.

Feb. 1933 *L'Astronomie*, Bulletin of the "Societe Astronomique de France."

A cover of *Amazing*, March 19?, illustrating the "Air-lords of Haan" by Phil Nowlan, which was made into a jigsaw puzzle, and is now pasted together and mounted.

Pages cut from an early *Amazing* (circa 1928) the title and author cut off. Story starts: "Pemberton, the Great Detective . . ." and the characters are Kidwell and Dexter.

Also a dozen snapshots of covers of early *Amazing*, *Science Wonder Stories*, *Air Wonder Stories*, *Wonder Quarterly*, *Science Wonder Quarterly* and *Astounding*.

I still enjoy *Amazing* . . . and the only ones I've missed since 1926 were a few during W.W. II, when some trouble on Okinawa kept me occupied.

Lew Torrance
Retail Adv. Dept.
Room 412
The Houston *Chronicle*
Houston, Tex.

Dear Editor:

I am starting a Fanzine and wish to find teen-agers to submit either stories or articles. The reason I ask for teen-age material is because this 'zine will be written for teen-agers only. It makes little difference to me whether or not their MS is typed or hand written.

Teen-agers need a 'zine in which they can submit material which will be read by people their own age. That is why I am starting this.

Also if any teen-ager has magazines or books which he wants to sell or trade, he can write to us and we will either buy them or find someone who will buy them.

Before closing I want to tell you that you have a delightful magazine, in fact we rank it as one of the best.

P.S. Please try to have your ms. in by fifteen days after this magazine hits the stands and no later than twenty-five days after.

Edward Gorman, Jr.
119 1st Ave., S.W.
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

• *Someday we're going to get very stern and insist these fanzine plugs go into the fanzine department where they belong. But these are nice kids, using their energies constructively. They rate all the help we can give.—ED.*



"THE SPACE CLUB"

The number of letters aimed at . . . *Or So You Say*, has doubled and tripled in the last few months. This has posed an editorial problem because most of them are worthy of publication and we hate to disappoint anyone who takes the trouble to write us a letter. But we have only so many pages per issue that can be devoted to this department.

We considered this situation and it occurred to us that possibly a desire to appear in print was not the only motivation behind the letters. Perhaps a lot of you science fiction fans just feel like writing a letter to someone who is also a fan and would be interested in your praises, gripes, and generally pleasant chit-chat.

With this thought in mind, we are starting *The Space Club*. The idea will be to put fans in contact with each other via the correspondence route. So if you would care to have other fans write you direct, send your name and address to us at *The Space Club, Amazing Stories, 366 Madison Ave., New York 17, N. Y.* Start your letter like this: "I would like to have you list my name in The Space Club, in *Amazing Stories*." Then go on to tell us something about yourself as a guide to those who will no doubt wish to write you a letter. State your age, sex, occupation, and anything else you think will be of interest. We will condense this information and list it along with your name in *The Space Club*.

Now—one very important thing. *If you are under twenty-one years of age, the signature of one of your parents or your guardian, must appear on the letter granting us permission to list you.* This is most important, so don't slip up on it or we won't be able to put you in the club.

The first list of names will probably appear in the November issue of *Amazing* because it would be difficult to get the project rolling in time for the October book. So send in your name, have patience and you'll find you have friends all over the world.

"All right," Purcell said. He walked over to the first of the big magna-sleds piled high with equipment. "We'll be setting up the base camp over here. I know the men still in the ship will want to stretch their legs soon as possible. We don't want to have to go looking for you, Glaudot."

"Not me, Captain," Glaudot assured him, and walked off toward the crater rim with young Ensign Chandler.

"What the devil was that?" Chandler said forty-five minutes later.

"Stop jumping at every

shadow you see. Relax."

"I thought I saw something moving behind that rock."

"So, go take a look."

"But—"

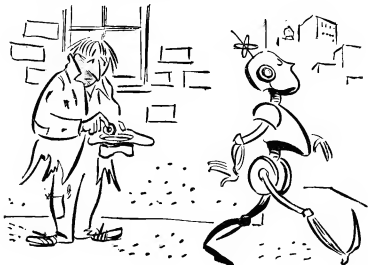
"Hell, boy, don't let that Purcell put the fear of the unknown into you on your very first trip out. Huh, what do you say?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Glaudot," Ensign Chandler replied.

"After all," Glaudot went on, "we have nothing to be afraid of. We're still within sight of the ship."

Chandler turned around. "I don't see it," he said.

"From the top of that rock you could."



"Think so?"

"Sure I do. Why don't you take a look if it will make you feel better?"

"All right," Chandler said, and smiled at his own temerity. But he knew vaguely that he'd been caught in a cross-fire between the cautious Purcell and the bold, arrogant Glaudot. Sometimes he really thought that the Captain's caution made sense: on Wulcreston, he'd learned at the Academy, a whole Earth expedition had been slaughtered before contact because the natives mistook hand telescopes for weapons. And surely on any world a spacesuited man looked more like a monster than a man although he was vulnerable in a spacesuit, even more vulnerable than a naked man because he could only run awkwardly.

All this Chandler thought as he climbed the high rock rampart. He'd send a sub-space letter back to the folks tonight, sure enough, he told himself. Not only had he been chosen for the preliminary exploration party, he'd made the first trip out of sight of the spaceship. It certainly was something to write home about, and Mom would be very proud . . .

He was on top of the rock now. The vast tortuous land-

scape spread out below him like a relief map in a map-maker's nightmare. Far to his left, beyond Glaudot's spacesuited figure, he could see the projectile-shaped spaceship resting on its tail fins. And to his right—

He stared. He gawked.

At the last moment he tried to get down from the rock, but his spaceboot caught on an outcropping and his fatal mistake was standing upright in an attempt to free it.

Then all at once in a blinding burst of pain he was clutching at something in his chest but knew as his life ebbed rapidly from his young body that it would not matter if he was able to pull the cruel shaft out. . . .

Glaudot went rushing up the side of the rock. He still couldn't believe his eyes. Ensign Chandler had been impaled by two long feathered shafts, two arrows. The force of the first one had spun Chandler around and he lay now with his back arched across the topmost ramparts of the rock, two arrows protruding from his chest and his life blood, starkly crimson against the white of the spacesuit, pouring out.

Reaching the top of the rock in an attempt to drag

the dying boy down, Glaudot saw the Indians rushing up the other side of the crater wall. Indians, he thought incredulously. Indians, as in the American West hundreds of years ago. Indians . . . But just what the hell were they doing here?

A muscular brave notched an arrow, his right hand drawing the feathered shaft back to his ear. Quickly Glaudot flung his arms skyward, hoping that the universal gesture of surrender would be understood. The brave stood statue-still. His lips opened. He was speaking to another of the half-dozen Indians in the raiding band, but Glaudot could not hear the words through his space helmet. He knew his life hung in the balance.

He watched, fascinated and helpless, as the Indian who had slain Ensign Chandler came toward him.

Tashtu said: "Two raiding bands, Lord. One go north. Other south. We follow?"

They had reached the advance Indian camp on the fringe of the Wild Country. So far they had seen nothing of the Cyclopes who lived in this part of the world. Of all their creations, Charlie and Robin feared and avoided

only the Cyclopes, the enormous one-eyed giants which had so intrigued Robin in the Encyclopedia that she'd had a compulsion to create them, and had done so.

"We can't follow both bands," Charlie said, looking troubled.

"Why can't we?" Robin asked. "You go north with some of the braves, Charlie. I'll go south. We ought to be able to overtake the raiding parties before anything happens."

"I can't let you go alone."

"All right. I'll take Tashtu with me. Don't you think Tashtu can take care of me as well as you can?"

"Well, I just don't like the idea—" Charlie began.

"That's silly. If we have to find them before there's trouble, we have to find them. Well, don't we?"

Charlie gave her an uncertain nod. He had grown up with her and had seen her every day of his life, but every time he took a good look at her, at the lovely face and the tawny, long-limbed form ill-concealed by the gold-mesh garments, it took his breath away. Although in a sense a whole world was his plaything, he had never seen anything so lovely. Finally he said, "I guess you're too logi-

cal for me. Take care of her, Tashtu."

"With my life, Lord," the Indian vowed as the group broke up. Robin ran to Charlie and hugged him, kissing his cheek half playfully, half in earnest.

"You be careful, too," she said, and went off with Tashtu and several of the braves.

Naturally she was excited. She knew more about spacemen than Charlie did. She had read the Encyclopedia more carefully, hadn't she? She wondered what the spacemen would be like. She couldn't help wondering it because the only man she had ever known, except for those they had created, was Charlie. Of course, she hadn't told Charlie this in so many words, but she felt, had always felt, vaguely and now felt clearly, that before she could settle down contentedly with Charlie, she would have to know something of the world beyond Crimson. And there was a vast world—a multitude of worlds—beyond Crimson. She knew that. The Encyclopedia mentioned all of them but did not mention Crimson at all.

They walked for several minutes through green forest, and then abruptly came to the edge of the Wild Country.

Even the idea of the Wild Country brought an eagerness to Robin's limbs and made her walk more rapidly. The Wild Country was unknown, wasn't it? They had created it without knowing quite what they were creating, and had never explored it.

She went ahead with Tashtu over the rocks and crushed pumice. No winds blew in Wild Country. The air was neither hot nor cold. The landscape seemed changeless and eternal, as if it had been that way since before the dawn of history, although actually Charlie and Robin had created it only a few years before.

They forged on for two hours, Tashtu following the easily read spoor in the pumice. They came at last to a low crater wall, where the spoor disappeared. At first Tashtu was confused, but then he pointed to the top, several hundred feet above their heads. Robin caught a glimpse of tawny skin and feathers and buckskin in the sunlight.

"Haloo!" Tashtu called, and some of the braves above them whirled, all speaking excitedly in the clumsy English which was the only tongue they knew.

"Huragpha slay monster,"

they said. "Capture other monster. But then see . . ." the words drifted off into silence. Obviously, the Indians were perplexed. "You come, see. Monster, him bleed like man."

At Tashtu's side, Robin rushed up the steep rocky slope. When they reached the top, breathless and all but exhausted, Robin put her hand to her mouth with a little cry of horror.

There was a dead man stretched out on the rock there, two arrows transfixing his chest through the fabric of his spacesuit. The spacesuit had probably frightened the Indians, but he was a man all right. Had they been closer, even the Indians would have known that. That poor man. . . . Why, he was hardly more than a boy.

Spacemen!

And there was another, surrounded now by several of the Indians. "Him prisoner," said the Indian called Huragpha a little uncertainly.

Robin walked over to the man in the spacesuit. He was a big man, even bigger than Charlie. He looked very strong, but the spacesuit might have been deceptive. He looked frightened, but not terrified.

"Are you really a spaceman?" Robin asked.

Glaudot said: "Well, so one of you can speak more than a few grunts. That's something." He looked carefully at Robin. "Beautiful, too," he said. The way he said it was not a compliment. It was an objective statement of fact.

"I know it won't help to say I'm sorry about your friend. Words won't help, I guess. But—"

"Yeah," Glaudot said. "All right. He's dead. I can't bring him back and you can't bring him back, sister."

"I'm not your sister," Robin said.

Glaudot told her it was a way of speaking. He couldn't quite believe his ears. She spoke English as well as he did, which was incredible enough here on a world halfway across the galaxy. But he got the impression that she was almost fantastically naive. Yet the Indians—and, incredibly, they were Indians—seemed to be subservient to her, almost seemed to worship her.

Glaudot sat down on his space helmet, which he had taken off some minutes before, and said: "Are you the boss lady around here?"

"Boss lady? I don't understand."

"Are you in charge? Do you run things?"

Robin smiled and said: "I created them."

"I'm sorry. Now *I* don't get you."

"I said I created them. It's very simple. My friend and I decided a very long time ago it would be nice or interesting or I forget what, it was so long ago, if we had some Indians. So, we created Indians."

Glaudot threw his head back and laughed. "For a minute," he said, "you almost had me believing you." The girl was dressed like a savage, he told himself, like a beautiful savage, but at least she had a sense of humor. That was something.

"But what is so funny?" Robin asked.

"You just now said—"

"I know what I said. My friend and I created the Indians. Of course. Why? Can't you create anything you want? Just anything?"

"All right, sister," Glaudot said a little angrily. He did not like being made fun of, for he lacked the capacity to laugh at himself. "Just how much of a fool do you think I am?"

"Why, I don't know," Robin replied. "How much of a fool are you?"

Glaudot glared at her. Purcell was going to be one mad captain when he was told of Chandler's death, but men had died on expeditions before and it really wasn't Glaudot's fault. At any rate he had established contact with somebody of obvious importance among the natives, and Purcell would appreciate that.

"Never mind," Glaudot said.

"Tell me about being a spaceman. Do you really fly among the stars?"

"Well, yes," Glaudot said, "although it isn't really flying."

"And do you create new stars as you go along?"

There she went again with her talk of creation, as if creating things out of nothing was the commonest occurrence in the world. Glaudot stood up. "All right, sister. Show me."

"Why, show you what?"

"Create something."

"You mean," Robin said, disappointed, "you actually can't?"

"Just go ahead and create something."

Robin shrugged. "What would you like?"

Glaudot thought for a moment. "A piano!" he said suddenly. "How about a piano?"

It was complicated enough, he thought. "And while you're at it, how about telling me how come everyone speaks English—or tries to speak English around here?"

Robin frowned. "Is there some other way of speaking?"

Glaudot also frowned. That line of thought wouldn't get him anywhere. "O.K.," he said. "One piano coming up?"

"All right," Robin said.

Glaudot blinked. The pretty girl hadn't moved. She hadn't even changed her facial expression. But a parlor grand piano stood on the rock before them.

"Well, I'll be damned," Glaudot said. "What else can you create?"

"We made all the natives here. We made the green and crimson. We made this whole Wild Country. We made some of the animals too."

"Like—the piano? Out of nothing?"

"Is there another way?"

Glaudot said, "You better come back to the ship with me. Captain'll like to see you."

Tashtu shook his head. "The Lady Robin awaits the Lord."

Glaudot looked at Robin. "Who's that?"

"Charlie. He's just my friend. I—I don't think I have

to wait for him. I've always been more interested in reading about spacemen than he has. I'll go with you now if you want."

Tashtu looked unhappy. "Lord Charlie, he say—"

"Well, you wait right here, Tashtu, and tell Charlie where I've gone. What could be simpler? I'll be all right, don't worry about me."

"Lord Charlie, he say watch you."

"And I say I'm going with the spaceman to his spaceship."

Tashtu bowed. "The Lady has spoken," he said, and watched Robin descend the rocky rampart and walk back with Glaudot toward the far distant glint of metal which was this spaceship they were talking about.

"So you can create just anything," Glaudot said.

"I guess so."

A goddess, he thought. A beautiful goddess who...

Suddenly he stared at her. Who could make him the most powerful man in the galaxy.

"This spaceship of yours—" she began.

"Wait. Wait a minute. If you can create anything, how's about re-creating Chandler?"

"Chandler? What is Chandler?"

"The boy back there. The one your braves killed."

Robin said: "If you wish," and Glaudot held his breath. The power over life and death, he thought...

He looked down and saw Chandler's spacesuited body there, the two arrows protruding from his chest. He shook his head. "Not dead," he said. "What good is he to anybody dead?"

Robin nodded. "I'm sorry," she said. "I just hadn't thought before of bringing people back to life. It... why it seems..."

"What's the matter?"

"I wouldn't really be bringing him back, you know. It would be a copy, just a copy."

"But a perfect copy?"

"I think so."

"Then if it's just a copy it shouldn't bother you at all, should it?"

"Well..." Robin said doubtfully.

"Go ahead. Show me you can do it."

Glaudot gaped. Another figure sat alongside Chandler's corpse, Chandler's second corpse. The other figure got up. It was Chandler.

"Look out!" the new Chan-

dlar cried. "Look out—Indians!"

"Just take it easy," Glaudot told him. Glaudot's face was very white, his eyes big and round and staring.

Chandler looked down at the body on the rocks. His knees buckled and Glaudot caught him, stopping him from falling. Chandler tried to say something, but the words wouldn't come. He stared with horrified fascination at the body, which was an exact copy of himself—or a copy of the dead man from whom the new living man was copied.

"May we go to your spaceship now?" Robin asked Glaudot politely. "I have always wished to see a spaceship."

Here was power, Glaudot thought. Incredible power. All the power to control worlds, to carve worlds from primordial slime, almost, for yourself. Here was far more power than any man in the galaxy had ever been offered. Was it his, Glaudot's?

It wouldn't be if he brought the beautiful girl to the spaceship and Purcell. For Captain Purcell, a devoted servant of the galactic civilization which he was attempting to spread to the outworlds, would think in

terms of what good the discovery of this girl could bring to all humanity. But if Glaudot kept her to himself...

And then another thought almost stunned him. Why merely the girl? She'd mentioned a friend, hadn't she? Perhaps it was something in the atmosphere of this strange world, in the very air you breathed. Perhaps anyone could do it, could create out of nothing—Glaudot included.

"You want to go to the spaceship?" he asked.

"Yes. Oh, yes."

"Then teach me the secret of creation."

"Of making things, you mean? Why, there isn't any secret. Should there be any secret? You merely—create."

"Show me," said Glaudot.

A table appeared, and savory dishes of food.

"Magician!" cried Chandler.

A great roan stallion, bridled but without a saddle, materialized. Robin swung up on its broad back and used her bare knees for balance and control. The stallion cantered off.

"Wait!" cried Glaudot. "Please wait."

The stallion cantered back

and Robin alighted. The stallion began to graze on a patch of grass which suddenly appeared on the naked rock. The stallion seemed quite content.

"You mean," the new Chandler asked in an awed voice, "she just *made* these things? The food. The table. The horse..."

"Yes," said Glaudot. He concentrated his will on creating a single flower in the new field of grass. He concentrated his whole being.

But nothing happened.

He glared almost angrily at Robin, as if it were her fault. "I don't have the power you have," he said.

She nodded. "Only Charlie and me." She looked at the roan stallion. "Beauty, isn't he? I'll present him to Charlie." She turned to Glaudot. "Now take me to the ship."

"We ought to get started back there, Mr. Glaudot," Chandler said.

"Yes? Why?"

"But—but I don't have to tell you why! This girl is one of the most important discoveries that has ever been made. The ability to create material things...out of nothing..."

"Show me your planet," Glaudot told Robin, ignoring the younger man. "We can

talk about the spaceship later. You see, I'm an explorer and it's my job to explore new worlds." He spoke slowly, simply, as he would speak to a child. Somehow, although the girl was not a child and was quite the most astonishingly beautiful girl he had ever seen, he thought that was the right approach.

"Now wait a minute, Mr. Glaudot," Chandler protested. "We both know it's our duty to bring her to Captain Purcell."

"Maybe you think it's your duty," Glaudot told the younger man. "I don't think it's mine. And before you run off to the ship to tell that precious captain of yours, you ought to know that you'd be dead right now if it hadn't been for me."

"You?"

"Hell, yes. Those Indians or whatever they were killed you. I asked the girl to bring you back to life."

"To bring—" echoed Chandler his mouth falling open.

"Actually, she produced a perfect copy of you. A living copy. Do you see what she offers us, Chandler? Infinite wealth from creativity out of nothing—and eternal life by copying our bodies each time we die! What do you say

about your precious captain now?"

Chandler seemed confused. He shook his head, staring first at Glaudot and then at Robin. "The ship," he said. "Our duty . . . the captain . . ."

Glaudot snorted and told Robin: "Kill him."

"Kill him?"

"Yes. You brought him into being. Now send him out of being."

"But I can't do that. I have no further control once I make something. And besides I—I wouldn't kill a human being, even if I could."

Fear was in Chandler's eyes. "Mr. Glaudot, listen . . ." he began.

"Listen, hell," Glaudot said. "I brought you back to life. I offered you a share in the greatest power the worlds have ever known. You turned it down. I'm sorry, Chandler. I'm really sorry for you. But I can't let you return to the ship, you see. Not until I learn some more about this world, not until I understand exactly what the girl's power is, and consolidate my position."

Without waiting to hear more, Chandler began to run. In three great bounds he reached the grazing roan

stallion and leaped on its back, digging his heels into its flanks. The stallion moved off at a quick trot as Glaudot drew his blaster and took dead aim at Chandler's retreating back.

When he had Chandler squarely in his sights, Glaudot began to squeeze the trigger. But suddenly the triggerhousing-unit of the blaster became encumbered with tiny vines. There were hundreds of them writhing and crawling all over the weapon and getting in the sights too so Glaudot could no longer aim. By the time he tore the vines clear, cursing savagely, the roan stallion had taken Chandler out of sight on his retreat toward the spaceship.

Glaudot whirled on Robin. "You did this!" he accused her. "You did it. Why—why?"

"You were going to kill him. You shouldn't have."

"But now you've ruined everything. Not just for me. For us, don't you see? I could have laid the world at your feet. I could have—listen! Tell me this—is there any place we can hide? Some place they won't find us if they come looking, while we work on this power of yours and see exactly what it can do and what it can't do?"

"I want to see the spaceship, please," said Robin.

"Afterwards, I promise you," Glaudot said. "Why, we can make all the spaceships we want—out of nothing. Can't we?"

"Yes," said Robin. "I guess so. "But even if we hide from your friends, my friend Charlie will find us. He'll be worried about me and he'll find us. Charlie can do everything I can do, you see."

Glaudot stared at her with anger in his eyes. Then something else replaced the anger. No, he thought, Charlie couldn't do everything she could do. She was beautiful. Her half-nude body summoned desire in him. Tentatively, ready to withdraw his hand at the first indication of protest, he touched her bare shoulder. She made no response. She merely stood there, waiting for some kind of an answer from him.

"Then we'll have to hide from Charlie too. Please believe me," Glaudot said. "I'm a spaceman and you know very little about spacemen. Do you want to learn?"

"Yes. Yes, I do."

"Then take me some place even Charlie will have difficulty finding us."

"But he'll know."

"What do you mean he'll know? Don't tell me you can read one another's minds?"

"Oh, goodness, no. Nothing like that. But when we were very little I once told Charlie if ever I got mad at him I would go to hide in the country of the Cyclopes and he would never be able to find me because the Cyclopes would eat him. That was after we read about the Cyclopes in the Ulysses story in our Encyclopedia. You see?"

"Cyclopes, huh? You really mean one-eyed giants?"

"Yes. We made them but they don't obey us."

"Can the two of us hide in their land? Is it far?"

"No. Very close. But I don't know if I want—"

"I'm a spaceman, aren't I? And you want to learn all about spacemen and the worlds beyond this place, don't you? Then come with me!"

"But—"

"If you say no and I go back to the spaceship we'll blast off and you'll never see spacemen again the rest of your life," threatened Glaudot.

Robin did not answer. "Well?" Glaudot snapped, as if he was quite indifferent. "Would you want that to happen?"

"No," Robin admitted after a while.

"Then let's go." They had to hurry, Glaudot knew. Riding that stallion, that incredible conjured-out-of-nothing stallion, Chandler had probably reached the spaceship by now. A few words, a few hurried explanations, and Purcell would lead an armed party out after Glaudot.

Again Robin was silent. Glaudot stood stiffly in front of her, so close he could reach out and wrap his arms about her. But this wasn't the time, he told himself. Later . . . later . . .

"All right," Robin said at last, her eyes looking troubled. "I'll take you to the land of Cyclopes."

They began to walk, in silence. Half an hour later, the barren terrain of rocks gave way to a verdant jungle in which the trees were quite the biggest Glaudot had ever seen and in which even the grass and the fragrant wild flowers grew over their heads. Glaudot had never felt so small.

"Wait a minute, Chandler," Captain Purcell said. "I listened in silence to what you said. All of it, as incredible as it sounded. But you don't expect me to believe—"

"Look at the horse. Where did I get the horse, sir?"

"So there are horses on this world. So what?"

"But I saw the girl create it out of thin air!"

"Really, Chandler."

"And I saw the corpse. My corpse, Captain. Mine!"

"But hell, man. Glaudot would have come back here with the girl. He knows his obligation to civilization. He—"

"Glaudot, sir? Does he?"

Purcell scowled and said finally: "Chandler, either you and Glaudot have made the most astonishing discovery since man first domesticated his environment and so became more than a reasonably clever animal, or you're the biggest liar that ever crossed deep space."

Chandler offered his captain a pale smile. "Why don't you find out which, sir?"

"By God," said Purcell, "I will. McCreedy!" he bawled over the intercom. "Smith! Wong! I want an armed expedition of twenty-five men ready to leave the ship in half an hour."

And, exactly half an hour later, the expedition set out with Captain Purcell and Chandler leading it. Chandler went astride the roan stallion.

When Charlie and his small Indian band learned that the action had taken place to the south, where Robin had gone, they set out quickly in that direction. The further they went, the more worried Charlie became. If Robin had met with any kind of success, if she had called off the war party and established some kind of peaceful relations with the spacemen, a runner would have been sent to tell them. But the desolate rock-strewn terrain stretched out before them as devoid of life as the paleozoic earth.

Charlie urged his men on relentlessly. He was a tireless hiker and since the braves lived by hunting they could match almost any pace he set. Finally Charlie saw the second Indian band ahead of them. Slinging the Mannlicher Elephant Gun, he began to run.

"Tashtu!" he called. "Tashtu!"

The Indian sprinted to him. "Lord," he said breathlessly, "one sky critter, him die. Turn out man."

"What are you talking about?" Charlie asked.

Tashtu led him to the group of braves which still clustered about Ensign Chandler's body. "Why?"

Charlie demanded, horror-struck. "Why?"

Tashtu told him all that had happened. How the braves had mistaken the space-suited man for a monster. How arrows had been fired before they had learned otherwise. How Robin had come, and gone off with the spaceman.

"To their spaceship?" Charlie asked.

"Yes, Lord. That is what they spoke of." Tashtu pointed to the top of the rampart of rock. "From there, Lord, you can see it."

Charlie scrambled up the rock. From his giddy perch on top he could see the tiny silver gleam of the spaceship—and a band of men, led by a man on horseback, approaching them. Charlie hurried down the dock, half climbing, half sliding. "They are coming," he said. "Maybe Robin's with them." He remembered what had happened last time and said: "The rest of you return to your homes. Tashtu and I will go on ahead."

"But Lord—" Tashtu began.

"Well?"

"I did not like the man. I did not trust him."

"Then why did you let Robin go?"

"Let her, Lord? But surely Robin, the Lady Robin, does not obey a mere—"

"All right, all right," Charlie said. "But all the more reason for the rest of the braves to return to their homes. We can handle this, Tashtu, you and I. I don't want any more killing."

"Yes, Lord," said Tashtu.

The Indians formed a marching column and moved off. Charlie told Tashtu what he had seen from the top of the rampart. Then he added: "Let's go and meet them."

And Charlie and Tashtu set out across the tortuous Wild Country.

"Two men coming!" Chandler cried, reining up the roan stallion.

Captain Purcell signaled his twenty-five men to halt, and their orderly double file came up short behind him. Pretty soon the two figures could be seen by all, advancing toward them across the rocks. When they were close enough, Captain Purcell hailed: "We come in peace!"

"And in peace we come!" Charlie called. A moment later he was shaking hands gravely with Captain Purcell.

"Tell the captain about—about my corpse," Chandler told Tashtu.

Charlie looked at Chandler. He had seen the dead man. "Did Robin make you?" he asked in surprise. "We never brought the dead to life before."

"Can you really do it?" Purcell demanded.

"No, not really. But we can copy perfectly—and the copies live."

"You see?" Chandler demanded triumphantly.

Captain Purcell said: "Show me."

Charlie created a brother to the roan stallion. Captain Purcell gawked. The one example sufficed and he did not ask for more as Glaudot had done.

"Where's Robin?" Charlie asked. "At the ship?"

Chandler shook his head. "Glaudot went off with her."

"But I thought he was of the ship!"

"He deserted," Chandler said. "With the girl. He wants her. He wants her power for himself."

Charlie moved very quickly. He swung in front of Chandler and grabbed his tunic-front, bunching it, ripping it and all but dragging Chandler clear off his feet before a hand could be raised to stop him. "Where did they go?" he asked in a terrible

voice. "Where are they? Take me to them."

"But I don't—don't know!" Chandler protested, trying without success to break free.

It was Captain Purcell who came forward and firmly took Charlie's arm, pulling him clear of Chandler. "Remember," he said. "In peace. In peace."

Charlie stood with his hands at his sides. His face was white and strained. "The girl," he said.

"We all want to find out where Glaudot took her," Captain Purcell said. "We're going to help you. Tell me: could the girl have gone willingly with Glaudot? To share his mad dream of power, perhaps?"

"Robin?" Charlie cried. "Never!"

"Please, lad," Captain Purcell said. "I want you to think. I want you to consider everything. You and this girl of yours may have almost godlike powers, but you've spent your lives on an uncivilized world and well—frankly—couldn't a sophisticated man like Glaudot turn the girl's head? Couldn't he confuse her into going off with him, at least temporarily? And, assuming, he did, he doesn't know this world.

He's aware of that. He'd know we'd be coming after him. Perhaps the girl would tell him about you. Tell me, man—where would the girl go if she didn't want you to find her? Is there such a place? Before you answer, I want you to know that what we do here may be far graver than you think. It is not merely the safety of one girl we have to consider—but no, you wouldn't understand..."

"You mean," Charlie asked, "if this man Glaudot somehow convinces Robin to use her power as he tells her, he might want to take over all of Crimson?"

"Do you mean this world? Is it called Crimson? Yes—and more than that. There's no telling how far a man like Glaudot could go with such power. And with the ability to create all the armament and all the deadly weapons he needed, and all the missiles to carry those weapons, he might challenge the entire galaxy—and win!"

The words were strange to Charlie. He only understood them vaguely. Now Robin, she would understand, he thought. Robin was always more interested in things like that, Robin who almost knew their encyclopedia by heart, Robin...

"Listen," he said. "Listen. We created all the life on this world. We made Greeks and Royal Navymen and Ministers and Russians and Congressmen and everything we knew or somehow had heard about or had read in our book. We get along fine with all of them, except..."

"Yes," Captain Purcell prompted. "Go on, go on!"

"No, she'd never go there. She was always afraid of them."

"Where, man? Where?"

"No. Robin wouldn't. She just wouldn't."

It was not hot in Wild Country, but sweat trickled down Purcell's face while he waited for Charlie's answer.

"Show me!" cried Glaudot in rapture. "Show me! Show me! Show me!"

He stood with Robin in a little glade in the Land of the Cyclopes. About them were heaped all the treasures Glaudot had suddenly demanded. He did not quite know why. He felt his iron control slipping and permitted it to slip now, for once he got this wild desire from his system, he knew only his untroubled iron will would be left, and with it—and the girl—he might conquer the galaxy.

Heaped about them were

jewels and precious metals and deadly weapons, all of which Robin had summoned into being at Glaudot's orders, while Glaudot smiled at her. It was almost a frightening smile. She was even a little sorry she had come away with him, but she could always go back, couldn't she? She wasn't shackled to this strange man from space, was she? And the way he looked at her, the desire she saw in his eyes, that was frightening too. She did not know how to cope with it. Oh, she could create a duplicate Charlie, for example. Charlie would know what to do. Charlie would help her. Charlie hadn't read the book as she had read it, but Charlie was more practical. Still, what would they do with the duplicate Charlie afterwards? You couldn't uncreate something...

"A spaceship," Glaudot said suddenly. "Can you create a spaceship out of nothing?"

Robin nodded slowly. "I can. Yes, I can. It tells all about spaceships in the book. But I don't know if I want to."

Glaudot let it pass. There was no hurry. He was thinking about the future, though.

If Purcell opposed him, as Purcell would, and managed to escape in the exploration ship, Glaudot would need a ship to leave this world...

"Why not?" he asked, his voice quite calm now, the mania which had seized him under control now, and only his iron purpose motivating him.

"I—I don't know. You have one spaceship. I guess that's why. What do you need another one for?"

"It was just a thought," said Glaudot. "It doesn't matter." He kneeled near the heaps of sun-dazzled jewels. He let them trickle through his fingers. No, the desire wasn't gone yet. It was still fighting with his will. And, since he knew his will could win at any time, it pleased him to give his desire free rein.

He scooped up a handful of jewels. He found a necklace and came close to Robin and dropped it over her head. The pearls were very white against her sun-tanned skin. The pearl pendant hung almost to the start of the dusky valley which cleaved her breasts delightfully and disappeared with the tanned swell of flesh on either side into the gold-mesh halter. Glaudot fingered the pendant.

His fingers touched flesh. Abruptly he drew the surprised Robin to him and kissed her lips hungrily.

For a moment she remained passive. She neither returned his ardor nor fought it. But when his hands began to stroke her back she pulled away from him and stood there looking at him. She took the necklace off and threw it at his feet.

"I don't want that any more," she said. "Why did you do—what you did?"

He felt the fire in his veins. He willed it to subside. He needed his control now. All of it. But this girl, in the full flower of her youth . . . No, she was not a girl, not to Claudot. He must not think of her as a girl. She was power. Power. The power was his—if he didn't alienate the girl.

"We do such as that on my world," he said. "It is a kind of homage to loveliness. "I hope you didn't mind."

"I—it was strange. With Charlie sometimes I hope—but with Charlie it is . . . different. Please don't touch me again. Please promise me that."

Claudot shrugged. "If you wish, my dear child, if you wish. . . ."

The dual desire was gone now, truly gone. He knew that. For his will had been threatened, more by his own foolish desire than by this innocent girl. He had to think. Clearly. More clearly than he had ever thought before. He needed the girl as an ally. Not as a slave. She had to be willing. She had to co-operate. Give her a warped picture of the rest of the galaxy? Convince her its governments were evil, totalitarian, when in reality they were democratic? Convince her that he alone, given unlimited power, could right the wrongs of a thousand worlds. She was naive enough for that sort of approach, he thought. Besides, it would strike her as something like creation — moral creation, perhaps. And creation she would understand. Then, with her as his partner, he could quickly build a war machine which the combined might of the galaxy couldn't stand against. And that, he suddenly realized, would even include an unlimited number of soldiers for occupation and policing duties. This power would be unparalleled.

"I have something I want to tell you about," he said. "It will take a long time and we must be undisturbed,

which is why I asked you to bring me here."

"What is it you want to tell me?"

Before Glaudot could answer, they heard a crashing, rending sound not too far off in the woods. It sounded to Glaudot exactly as if trees were being uprooted, boulders strewn carelessly.

"Cyclopes!" Robin screamed in terror, and began to run.

Glaudot ran after her, stumbling, picking himself up, hurtling in pursuit. He couldn't let her get away. He had to follow her...

Nothing living, he told himself as he ran, could uproot those huge trees. Of course, there were the saplings, but even the saplings were the size of full-grown oaks and maples on far Earth.

Something roared behind him. The sound was pitched almost too low for human ears. He whirled. The earth shook, great clods of it flying. Bare tree roots suddenly appeared, and a young tree the size of a towering oak was lifted skyward.

Behind it, brandishing it and then hurling it away, was a naked man whose head towered impossibly a hundred and fifty feet into the air.

Trembling, awestruck, Glaudot looked up at the great savage face. Wild hair streaming, filthy beard matted with dirt and tree-branches, it was the most ferocious face Glaudot had ever seen.

And it had only one eye, one enormous eye in the middle of its head. But an eye three feet across!

"A Cyclops!" Robin screamed again.

A moment later the creature stooped and with a scooping motion of its great right hand picked up the two tiny creatures on the forest floor beneath it. Then it ran, uprooting oak-sized saplings, back toward the rocky hillside where it dwelled, after the Cyclopes of old on which Robin and Charlie had naively patterned it, in a cave overlooking the sea.

"Where, man? Where?" Captain Purcell demanded.

"I don't know," Charlie said. "I really don't think she would. You see, she always threatened she'd go there if we ever had a fight, but she was usually half-joking. She knows it's dangerous—"

"But where? Don't you know a drowning man has to grasp at straws? Haven't

I gotten it across to you—the whole galaxy may be in danger!”

Charlie sighed. “I don’t understand much of your galaxy. Robin knows the encyclopedia — she would understand. And I—I only want to know Robin is safe.” He took a deep breath and said: “She always threatened to go to the Land of the Cyclopes.”

“Then take us there at once,” Captain Purcell said....

If he shouted and cried now, he would go insane. He knew that. He tried to hold his fear in check. He was being swung pendulum-like in an enormous hand as the one-eyed giant loped along. Robin shared the clenched-fist prison with him. Her hair streamed in the wind as the huge arm swung the huge hand in time with the giant’s enormous strides.

“Does it eat people?” he managed to ask Robin. He had to shout because the wind created by the creature’s movement was considerable. The ground spun giddily far, far below them, whirling patches of green, of yellow, of brown.

“We made them to eat people. Like in the book. We

were just children. It seemed—it seemed so thrilling.”

The Cyclops loped along, uprooting saplings. After a while it began to climb a rocky slope and from the heights Glaudot could see the shores of an unknown sea. Then the Cyclops reached a cave entrance and rolled aside a huge boulder and took his prisoners within.

Glaudot heard the bleating of sheep.

“Why, it’s a fortune in jewels!” Captain Purcell exclaimed. They had found the glade in the forest, where Robin had created a king’s ransom for Glaudot. The men gathered around, many of them struck dumb by the sight of all this wealth.

Charlie said: “Captain, look.”

Purcell went over to him and saw the wide swathe cut through the forest and curving out of sight. “What went through there?” he gasped.

“A Cyclops,” Charlie said grimly. “A Cyclops has them. Captain, we’ve got to hurry. Listen, there are two horses now. I could create horses for all of us, but all these men coming up would probably be seen by the Cyclops. You come on foot with your men. Let one of them

come with me on the stallions." As he spoke Charlie unslung the Mannlicher and put it down.

"Oh, you want our more modern weapons?" Purcell asked.

Charlie shook his head. "For fun, Robin and I made the Cyclopes invulnerable to any kind of attack except the kind mentioned in the encyclopedia—putting out their single eye with a stake. To protect all the other people we created, we made the Cyclopes so they'd never want to leave their homeland. So if we can get Robin and your man Glaudot free, they'll be safe. Now, who's the volunteer?"

"I'm already on horseback," Chandler said. Charlie nodded and mounted the second roan stallion.

"My men will be coming as fast as they can march," Captain Purcell said.

Charlie nodded. He did not bother to tell the captain that a Cyclops could cover in a few minutes ground a marching party could not hope to cover in as many hours. He set off at a swift gallop with Chandler.

"Will he eat us now?" said Glaudot. Strangely, he was not afraid. The unexpected

nature of their impending demise he almost found amusing.

Robin shook her head. "I don't think so. He'll probably drink himself to sleep. We made the Cyclopes great drunkards."

The Cyclops, his tree-trunk sized walking stick leaning against the wall, was reclining and drinking from a huge bowl of wine. The cave was torchlit. Seventy or eighty sheep milled about, settling for the night after three of their number had supplied a meal for the giant, who had eaten them raw.

"Isn't there anything we can do?" demanded Glaudot, whose dreams of galactic conquest were fading before the spectre of being eaten alive.

"Reserve your strength until he sleeps," Robin said. "Of course there's something we can do."

"Yes? What?"

"His walking stick. You see the end comes almost to a point? We harden it in the fire—and put his eye out. Then, in the morning, when he unrolls the stone from the cave-entrance and blindly leads his flock out, we hide among the sheep and make our escape. At least that's how it happens in the encyclopedia."

Glaudot swallowed hard. He had never had a great deal of physical courage....

Just then they heard a great fluttering, groaning sound. Robin said: "You see, he's asleep. He's snoring."

"I—I don't think I could possibly—"

"He's liable to want us for breakfast. Come on."

They got up swiftly and silently, and crept to the walking stick. It was the size of a young tree. It would be heavy, perhaps too heavy for them to handle.

"Easy now," Robin said. She nimbly climbed the ledges on the cave-wall and tipped the great walking stick, then leaped down and grabbed the front end as Glaudot got a grip on the rear of the big pole.

"Heavy," Glaudot said.

"But not too heavy, I—I think."

"Try to lift it," said Glaudot.

They tried. Together they could barely get it overhead.

"Try to poke it at something," Glaudot said.

They could not. Robin sighed. They put it down slowly, quietly. It would take more than the two of them. It would take them and two or three more men to do the job.

"We wait," Glaudot said bleakly.

Robin stared up in frustration at the smoke hole, through which smoke from the Cyclops's fire poured out into the gathering night. It was hopelessly over their head, although help could reach them through it from the outside. But how could they possibly expect help to come...?

"We wait," Glaudot said again, hopelessly.

"For breakfast," Robin said.

Glaudot broke suddenly. "I don't want to die!" he cried. "I don't want to die..."

The feeblest of Crimson's three suns came over the horizon, lighting the landscape with the illumination of three or four full moons on Earth.

"I told you I smelled smoke!" Charlie cried, pointing triumphantly at the thin tendril of smoke that rose through the cooling air against the weak sunlight.

"Is it a campfire?" Chandler asked.

"Chimney hole, probably. Come on."

They left the two stallions grazing at the base of the rocky escarpment. They began to climb. Once Chandler

stumbled and went sliding down the rocky slope, but Charlie caught his arm, all but wrenching it from the socket. Charlie thought: we have to hurry. Their lives may depend on it. Already we may be too late...

The smoke from the chimney hole was acrid. It was very strong now. Suddenly Charlie could feel the slightly increased slope of the rocks. The slope was precipitous now, almost perpendicular.

"I can't—can't go much further!" Chandler groaned.

"We've got to, man. We've got to."

"He's waking," said Robin.

Glaudot had broken completely. The confident would-be conqueror was reduced to trembling and whining now. "M-maybe he's hungry. Oh, God, maybe he's hungry..."

But the Cyclops only turned over in its sleep and began to snore again. The fire had burned low. The sheep were resting. Robin thought of Charlie, probably many miles away. There would be a late moonrise tonight, she thought. They often spoke of the feeblest of Crimson's three suns as the moon, although it really wasn't. Then dawn would come. If the Cyclops were

hungry and wanted a change in diet...

"But you'll choke to death going down there," Chandler protested.

"It's only a chimney hole. Nobody's going to choke to death."

"Can you see down it?"

"No. Too much smoke."

"Then how do you know how far we'll have to fall?"

"I don't. I'll have to take the chance. You don't have to, though."

"I'll go where you go. That's what I volunteered for."

"Good. It's almost morning, so the fire's probably almost burned down from now. If you land in the embers, jump aside quickly. You understand?"

"Yes," Chandler said.

Without another word, Charlie suddenly lowered himself into the smoke and let go.

Dim fiery light lit the cave. He alighted in embers and quickly jumped clear. Embers flew. A ram bleated. Charlie saw the enormous sleeping bulk of the Cyclops against one wall of the cave. He heard something behind him, and whirled. It was Chandler. More sparks flew. The

sheep bleated again, louder this time.

Robin and a spaceman who was probably Glaudot came toward them. There was amazement on Robin's face. Glaudot looked like a child in the grip of terror he couldn't quite understand.

Charlie held Robin close for a moment. "Quiet," he whispered. "Listen."

The slight disturbance had bothered the Cyclops. He was half awake. He made noises with his lips. One great arm lifted and fell. It could have crushed the four of them.

"There's a stake," Robin said. "Just like in the book."

They got it and took it to the embers of the fire between them. Glaudot, who brought up the rear, dragged his end, the wood scraping on the rocky floor.

"Lift it up," Charlie said.

Glaudot giggled and then began to cry. He was hysterical. "The three of us?" Charlie asked.

"I don't know," Robin said.

Glaudot laughed hysterically. The Cyclops stirred. That made up Charlie's mind. He placed his end of the stake carefully on the floor and went back to Glaudot. He struck Glaudot neatly and precisely on the point of the

jaw and Glaudot collapsed in his arms.

Then they returned with the stake to the fire. Charlie scraped and pushed the embers together with a charcoal log. They began to toast the point of the stake.

"We've got to hurry," Robin said.

"The skin of his eyelid is like armorplate," Charlie told her. "We've got to make sure it doesn't turn the point aside."

The flock stirred and began to grow more lively. It was now dawn outside. The Cyclops yawned in his sleep and stretched out an arm the size of an oak tree.

"Hurry!" Robin said urgently.

The Cyclops rolled over, its face to the wall.

"The eye!" Charlie groaned. "We'll never be able to reach the eye now."

They kept at their work, though. There was nothing else they could do. The surface wood of the big stake was taking on a dull cherry-red color. Finally Charlie said: "That's enough, I guess."

The Cyclops rolled over again. They were in luck, Charlie thought, but changed his mind immediately. The Cyclops sat up, its eye blink-

ing sleepily. It yawned and stretched mightily, then stared stupidly for a few moments at the flock of sheep. Charlie and the others stood frozen, not daring to move. The Cyclops brushed at the sheep with its hand, and two of them crashed with bone-crushing thuds and death-rattle bleats against the wall. The Cyclops glared stupidly about, its one great eye squinting. Clearly, it was looking for something else to eat. Not sheep. People...

It got down on hands and knees and groped on the floor. The arm swept out. The hand flashed ponderously by, missing Robin by only a few feet. The Cyclops advanced on its knees, searching, its mouth slavering now. It was hungry and soon it would eat...

The hand swept by again, caught a sheep. The hand lifted, the sheep bleated, the jaws crunched once and the sheep disappeared. The Cyclops wiped a trace of blood from its lips. The hand came down again, closer...

"The stake!" Charlie whispered fiercely.

They brought it up horizontally. Charlie stood just behind the point, Robin behind him, Chandler in the

rear. They jabbed with the stake as the Cyclops's hand swept along the floor again. The Cyclops roared with pain and rage and beat both mighty hands on the rocky floor, attempting to crush its tormentors.

Just then Glaudot regained consciousness and stood up groggily. "Don't move!" Charlie warned, taking the chance of revealing their own position in an attempt to save Glaudot's life.

But Glaudot, seeing the huge creature so close, began to run. It was like running on a treadmill. He ran and he ran and after a while the Cyclops reached down and plucked him off the floor. He screamed thinly. There was the same crunching as before—and no Glaudot...

Now the Cyclops, its appetite whetted, searched the floor in a frenzy of earnest on hands and knees. The great head swung low, close to the floor, the single eye stared myopically. Once the huge hand clubbed the rock so close to them that Charlie could feel the floor shaking. They retreated slowly toward the far wall of the cave, the monster following relentlessly. They still held the heavy stake between them but had not yet gathered either the

strength or the courage for their one try. If they failed—

They had backed up as far as they could. The wall was behind them. The monster came on, its head low, its nose practically scraping the ground. It swept the floor with a giant hand, a fingertip barely touching Charlie and almost knocking him senseless. He shook his head and took deep breaths until his strength returned.

"Now," he said, as the hand began its swinging arc again.

They ran forward toward the creature's single eye with the stake.

Charlie barely remembered the contact, or the bath of eye-fluid and blood which followed, or the wild roaring of the brute creature, or its frantic charging back and forth, blinded, across the cave, while the flock bleated and stampeded. After a while the crazed Cyclops ran to the cave entrance and shouldered the great door-rock aside, rushing out into the day.

It went tearing down the slope and did not stop until, battered and bleeding, it reached the sea. It stood on the narrow strand of beach for a moment, scooping great handfuls of water for its

stricken eye. Then it plunged into the surf.

They went outside and watched it. They made their way down the slope while it advanced into the sea. Finally only the great head remained above the waves.

They reached the shore.

The Cyclops was gone.

Moments later, Captain Purcell and the others joined them.

"Then you mean you won't come back to Earth with us?" Purcell asked later, in the spaceship.

"Not if all you say about this world is true," Charlie said. "We're needed here."

"Yes," Purcell agreed. "With your help, the galaxy could be made into a universe of plenty for everyone."

"Besides," said Charlie. "We'll have to think of training children to take over after we're gone." She looked at Charlie. She blushed. "Such as our own," she said, very quickly, and added: "You can marry us, can't you, Captain?"

Purcell beamed, and nodded, and did so.

Later, Charlie said: "It isn't only that we're needed here, is it, darling?"

Robin shook her head. "We like it here," she said.

THE END

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